# BETSY HALE SUCCEEDS

PEMBERTON GINTHER

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"Jimmy Delaney! Where's Your Camel?"

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By
PEMBERTON GINTHER
Author of *The Miss Pat Series*, etc.

*ILLUSTRATIONS*
*BY THE AUTHOR*

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# Betsy Hale Succeeds

## CHAPTER I

### The Letter from France

THE long, pleasant summer was over. The fields and forest trees were still green, but the goldenrod flamed by every wayside and the dogwood hung out gay banners of red to the quickening breezes. The summer was over.

Betsy Hale, coming out of the post office on her way home from the library, stuffed the letters in her sweater pocket, tucked the two books more firmly under her arm, and ran lightly down the store steps out into the mellow autumn sunshine. She had hardly glanced at the letters, for her whole mind was on the books which she had just gotten from the library.

"I'm glad tomorrow will be Sunday," she thought happily. "I'll have lots of time to

read. It's really a blessing that Philip is away just now and that Selma is going over to Highville for the day. I ought to be able to manage to get through with one of the books by Monday. I wonder which I'll start with?"

She stopped in the road for a moment as she shifted the volumes to examine them more closely. The blue-covered "Children of Compeigne" looked very inviting, but after glancing through the red-backed "Reconstruction Work in France" she chose it. The pictures of rebuilt villages, and tiny clusters of portable houses, of reclaimed battle-fields appealed to her more strongly than the pictureless little blue book.

"I'll read you first," she told the red book, as she tucked it again under her arm. "Then I'll tell Selma all about it, and we can look over the pictures together at recess. She won't care much about the reading, but she'll love the pictures."

As she started off again, she cast an upward glance over her shoulder. It was a habit she had whenever she passed that corner, and although it had been a habit for some months,

she never did it without a little thrill, remembering all that it had meant to her.

The big flag was floating serenely against the hazy blue of the afternoon sky, its bright folds lifting and falling gently on the breeze, its starry field shining out bravely and its very cords and rigging standing out clearly in the golden sunshine.

"It's always the same," thought Betsy ardently. "I believe it's the most beautiful thing in the whole world."

Once again, as in that day in the early summer, she felt the rush of a great desire within her. She pressed the two inspiring books close to her quickly beating heart. A confused impulse toward some newer service to the flag that might find its way to those desolated villages abroad swept through her.

"Oh, I do wish I were older, so I could go help make those ugly places prettier over there in France," she sighed. "It's so horrid to be only going-on-to-fifteen, when there's so much to do. I'd go over right straight away if they'd let me, and I'd do, oh, lots of things."

She walked slowly on in the warm sunshine, picturing the scenes across the sea. She forgot that the book was not a new one, and she felt instant need for beautifying those war-racked regions. She longed to plant trees, vines, flowers over the grimy places—to make that section exactly like the Wee Corner, in fact. She knew she could do much and she wanted to do it instantly.

"Oh, if I only could go," she breathed longingly. "If I only could manage to go! I know there would be lots of things I could do, even if I am terribly young."

She was quite impatient with the restrictions that kept young patriots in useless idleness at home.

"What's the use of studying geography, when it will all be changed in such a short while?" she said with a shake of her smooth brown head. Her clear blue eyes shone with an intense light. She swept aside the rest of her studies without a qualm. "It's silly to be trifling with books when one might be doing something *worth while*," she ended vigorously.

She passed the beechwood copse without a glance at its silvery, yellowing beauty. Her

whole mind was on the fascinating subject of making over Europe. "If Mother would only go," she thought, "she might find lots to write about—even if the editors do say that France is written out. She'd make it seem new. I believe we ought to do all we can to help and not just settle down here where everything is sweet and lovely."

She came down the long slope past the big field where the corn was already cut and shocked. The long lines of yellow-green tents stretched over the hill and stood out against the sky. Betsy looked at it with interest. She wished it were a cornfield in France.

Up in the Church Annex someone was putting off some records to test the machine which was to furnish music for the entertainment that evening. The funds were to go to the European Relief League and the selections were to be appropriate. The notes of the noted military band rang out in the Marsellaise as Betsy stopped to listen.

"Oh, how *sweet!*" she cried with a throb of pleasure in the faint, clear notes. "It makes it seem just sinful not to go!"

She might have stopped longer, but another

sound was making itself heard as she listened. It was an eager, yapping sound, and Betsy knew it very well.

"Mac's tied up and howling," she thought, dropping into everyday life again. "I suppose he's been bothering Lucy's parsley bed again. If he only wouldn't!"

The Wee Corner lay smiling in the sunshine as she hurried down the long slope. The tall sentinel pines were darkly green against the dogwoods and sumacs of the thicket on the back road. The summerhouse was draped in a glowing mantle of gay Virginia creeper. The borders were bright with asters and marigold and in the midst of it all the little white house nestled cosily.

The sounds of Mac's discontent grew more audible as Betsy hurried on.

"He's in the barn," she said to herself as she slammed the gate behind her and ran around the house, flinging the books, with the letters under them, on the summerhouse table as she ran.

There was no sign of anyone about. The careful Lucy was taking her afternoon outing and Mrs. Hale was at her typewriter. Betsy

caught the click of its keys as she passed under the window. Mac's howls redoubled as he heard the footsteps of his rescuer.

"Yow - wow - wow - WOW!" he howled, louder and louder every instant.

Betsy knew the very spot, the very iron ring where she should find him. He had been punished in this way before, for he had a passion of burying his cast-off bones in the middle of the neat Lucy's treasured bed of parsley, and no amount of discipline could shake his belief that the parsley bed was the best storage place he could find.

He tugged at his chain until his tongue hung out, and almost choked himself with joyful excitement when Betsy opened the big door and flew to his relief. He was not at all ashamed, it seemed, for he wagged his stumpy tail and barked short happy barks as she fumbled at the catch.

She felt too much stirred by the generosity of the moment to try to make him feel the proper sense of his iniquity. She merely patted the rough yellow head as she released the snap and left him free.

"Poor old Mac," she said tenderly. Sym-

pathy with all prisoners stirred her deeply. She was glad to see him bound away into the sunshine, and though he made straight towards the back garden she did not call him back. "Poor doggie, he doesn't know what he's doing," she thought, very sentimentally, as she turned towards the summer house to get the books and letters.

She was thinking of the pictures in the red book and those other pictures she had made for herself were still dimly with her, clouding her bright common sense and rather obscuring her judgment. She would not look back towards the parsley bed. She did not want to see what was going on there.

The books were in the summer house and the letters were under them. Betsy caught them all up together and tripped into the house, where the sound of the typewriter had ceased. She was framing in her mind a hundred eager questions regarding her own part in the reconstruction of France, and it was rather disappointing to find her mother so deeply immersed in correcting a pile of typewritten sheets that she would hardly look up as Betsy put the mail on the table beside her.

"Thank you, dear, I'll look at them later," she murmured abstractedly, and went on with her work.

Betsy was too full of her subject to be postponed. Besides, she knew that the work of making corrections was very much less important than the actual writing of those sheets; so she lingered a moment and then burst out with her plea.

"Oh, Mother, don't you think we might go to France? So many people are going, and you could write splendid stories, and there are so many things to do, and I'm really very strong and can work quite hard, even if I am only going on fifteen; and if you'd take tonics and walk a lot you would soon be able to do perfectly splendid writing——"

She broke off suddenly, as her mother swung about in her chair.

Mrs. Hale's blue eyes were wide and disturbed. She came out of her abstraction with a little frown of perplexity between her pretty eyebrows, and she shook back the little curling wisps of hair with a rather impatient gesture.

"What *are* you talking about, Betsy?"

she asked. "Who in the world wants *me* to write about French stories?"

Betsy drew a long breath. She felt she was going to have a hard time to make her mother see the matter as she saw it.

"I am talking about work," she said very soberly. She could not talk as brilliantly as she could dream. "And there are hundreds of things you could see and write about that other people missed——"

Mrs. Hale's eyes were clear now and she understood Betsy quite well. She pushed the papers away from her, smiling a little as she reached out to pat her daughter's shoulder. She understood, but she did not seem inclined to discuss the matter. Instead she took up the letters silently, still smiling her kind, sweet little smile, and she sorted them over with an eager intentness.

Betsy was used to waiting for her mother's decisions. She saw that she had not made the impression she had hoped, but still she did not despair. There was something in her mother's manner that was very promising.

"Here it is," said Mrs. Hale, picking up an envelope covered with scribbled and stamped

inscriptions, which Betsy had not noticed in the bundle of mail. "Here it is. I'd forgotten it entirely, as usual. Just wait, my dear, till I read it."

Betsy waited, growing more interested. She watched her mother's eyes travel up and down the thin sheets, while the smile grew more tender and a soft light shone from her serious face. It was a long time till the last sheet was read, and Betsy could hardly restrain herself, as Mrs. Hale laid down the thin closely written paper, after searching for some item in the newspaper on her table, and turned to her again.

"Oh, Mother, are we going to France?" she burst out, catching up the envelope with its many postmarks. "Oh, Mother, please say we are!"

"It's quite a different matter," said Mrs. Hale gently. "It's too late for us to go to France, but we are going to do our share, Betsy-girl, and I am looking to you to bear the heavy end of the log. I know you will be glad to do it. You will have to share your studies with her and try to make her happy——"

"But—" began Betsy, bewildered.

"The little girl from Muedun," explained Mrs. Hale. "Mrs. Warren wrote me about her last month and I wrote at once to have her sent here. One must help, of course, in the healing of those war-wounds, particularly when many people are losing interest in such an old story. She sailed on the *Fredonia*, and the *Fredonia* is to dock today. She will be here tomorrow afternoon."

"But who? Who?" demanded Betsy, aflame with curiosity.

"Why, Amiee LaLanne, of course," replied her mother, quite as though she had explained everything. "She will be brought as far as the Junction by another immigrant and we must meet her at the station. It is all arranged most minutely."

"Is she coming to stay with us?" asked Betsy, breathless with interest. "Who—where——?"

Mrs. Hale picked up her pencil again. She evidently thought she had made the matter very clear, but she was patient with Betsy's curiosity. "She is the French orphan who is to live with us until she is educated, or some

of her family can be found," she said rather absently. "Mrs. Warren wrote me of her a month or so ago. She used to know the family in France. It was difficult to arrange, but it is all settled now. Run and ask Lucy to have the little spare room put in order, will you, my dear?" and she settled down to her work again, entirely oblivious of the astonishment and dismay on Betsy's vivid face.

Betsy went slowly out of the room and downstairs. She felt as though a bomb had exploded at her feet.

"A French orphan," she repeated. "Right here in the Wee Corner, too. A real French orphan."

She did not wonder at all about Amiee LaLanne—what she was like or how she would like her new home. She was too much occupied with other feelings in the first moment of shock.

"Now we'll never get to France at all," she said dolefully. All of those noble emotions she had felt for the flag and the ruined villages seemed to be quite wasted. It was very tame indeed.

"Anyone could take a French orphan for a

while," she told herself. "There's nothing *exciting* about that!"

She went out into the garden, still holding the two books under her arm. She made her way to the summerhouse and sat down in the long chair. The zest had gone out of life. She shut her eyes to shut out the pretty garden and the bright sunshine. She felt like a prisoner in the peaceful scene.

"A French orphan," she repeated once more. "And I suppose she'll stay forever!"

There was a sound of rustling among the leaves at her feet, and she opened her eyes to see Mac, with his nose encrusted with fresh earth, standing beside her chair, looking up at her with a disturbed expression.

She leaned quickly down to catch his rough head in her two strong little arms.

"Oh, Mac, Amiee LaLanne is coming tomorrow," she said, giving him a very hard squeeze. "You'll have to be nice to her, you know, because she's a French orphan, but you mustn't love her more than you love me."

Mac sat up with his red tongue hanging out in an amiable smile, and his little brown eyes were so true and steady that Betsy felt

suddenly ashamed of herself. The glamor of her dream pictures faded quite away, and she sat up in the long chair, herself again—kind, brave and unselfish.

"I'm a silly thing to be thinking of going so far away," she told him with a little laugh at herself. "I'd simply cry my eyes out to leave the dear Wee Corner and Selma and Philip and all. It was perfectly lovely of Mother to have Amiee LaLanne come to us. I wonder what she'll be like?"

It was tremendously interesting, now that she looked at it in the right way. No one else in the village had any such proud privileges. Some of them contributed to the support of Belgian or French orphans, but not one family had a real, flesh-and-blood orphan for their own.

She reached for the books she had flung on the table.

"I'll read every word of them both before tomorrow morning," she planned, kindling at the thought. "I may have to stay up all night, but I simply must know all about the builded villages and the poor deserted children, so that I can understand how Amiee LaLanne feels."

She opened the "Children of Compeigne," at the title page. There was a relish in the very type that lured her.

"A French orphan. In the Wee Corner," she murmured as she turned the first page. "I wonder what she'll be like?"

## CHAPTER II

### Amiee Arrives

"WE'RE just in time," said Mrs. Hale. The train was sliding around the last curve as they reached the little station. It slowed down for the station platform as Mr. Simpson pulled up the horse and they jumped down. Mrs. Hale had thought it best to have a conveyance for the little newcomer who had traveled so many weary miles to her journey's end, and Mr. Simpson had offered the two-seated surrey with himself as driver.

Betsy hurried to the front platform. She wanted to have the very first glimpse of their guest. "I suppose she will look very Frenchy and different," she had said to her mother on the way. "There won't be any trouble about recognizing her, I am sure."

She was surer than ever, as she glanced at the sturdy country girls and their equally hearty mothers who were waiting on the cinder path beside the tracks.

"She won't look much like them," she smiled at her mother, who was scanning the windows of the cars as they slowed to a full stop. She felt a thrill of pride in Amiee LaLanne, who would be so very different and so very superior.

"There she is," she exclaimed, as a tall girl in dark clothes appeared on the platform of the second car. "How *sweet!*"

But the tall girl stepped down to a small group of waiting friends and disappeared at once in their eager company. It was plain she could not be Amiee LaLanne.

"There isn't anyone else," cried Betsy in great disappointment. "Not a single girl——"

She stopped as her mother went towards the steps of the third car, where a black-robed, square-set woman was tugging a huge valise through the door, while the obliging train-man was carrying out two large paper parcels which she had just handed him. A shadowy figure hovered behind in the little recess at the end of the car. The woman chattered and gesticulated as she handed the valise to the conductor, and then she backed

into the car again, shoving the other figure out toward the steps of the car.

Betsy caught her breath. "Oh!" she said to herself. She said it sharply, as though some one had stuck a pin in her arm.

It was a short, thick-set girl in heavy black. She moved slowly down the steps, while the woman, nodding and waving to Mrs. Hale, who had advanced, poured out a perfect flood of explanation and counsel as to the care of her charge.

The conductor and train-man paused for the girl to reach the cinder path, for the final excited instructions from the escort, and for Mrs. Hale to accept the slow girl together with her bundles and valise. And then the train began to move, the conductor and train-man jumped on, and the shriek of the whistle drowned the last shouted words of the excited woman on the car platform.

Betsy stood perfectly still as the train pulled out and left the little group on the cinders. She stared at the short, heavy-faced girl in crêpe, who was looking calmly at Mrs. Hale, who, in her turn, was occupied with the bundles and bag which the station agent was taking up.

"She isn't a bit French looking," thought the dismayed Betsy, noting the broad, indifferent face beneath the crêpe hat. "The only thing that's odd about her is the mourning hatband. She looks exactly like some of these country girls."

Then she went forward with her hand outstretched. Her ready sympathy was beginning to rise as she saw the little perplexed frown on the stranger's forehead deepen at Mrs. Hale's question as to her luggage.

"You are Amiee, aren't you?" she said in her friendliest voice and in very clear French. She was glad she had gone into languages so thoroughly now that she needed to use one of them.

The girl bowed with a rather distant air, and disregarding the outstretched hand, she turned to Mrs. Hale, speaking in careful English and almost without an accent.

"It is all the luggage I have, Madame," she explained in a slightly impatient way. "Madame Koot thought it best to carry it with us by hand. The luggage vans are untrustworthy at present, she says."

Mrs. Hale laughed her little rippling laugh

and patted the stranger's shoulder kindly. "I am sure it is a vast deal more than we looked for, my dear," she said in her brightest fashion. "I am almost disappointed that your possessions are so numerous, for it leaves us so much less to do for you. We've been looking forward with so much pleasure to your coming," she added, as they followed the bundles to the surrey, where the obliging Mr. Simpson was active in helping the station agent to stow them away beneath the seats.

Betsy felt rather snubbed, and she slipped into her seat beside the amiable Mr. Simpson very quietly, not venturing another word to the newcomer.

"She doesn't like me at all," she thought, fixing her eyes on a buckle in the harness. She would not look around unless they spoke to her—on that she was quite determined.

"I'll be pleasant if she wants to talk to me, but I shan't bother her again."

The drive was a very silent one. Mr. Simpson was absolutely mute, except for some chirping and clucking to the willing horse. Mrs. Hale made one or two little comments on the landscape, to which Amiee

made short, mechanical replies. Altogether it was very stiff and uncomfortable, and entirely different from any of the imagined meetings which had been dancing through Betsy's nimble brain since yesterday.

As they came in sight of the Wee Corner Betsy could not forbear.

"There it is," she cried, turning to watch the effect on the strange girl's face. "There is the place we live. Isn't it the dearest little house in the world?"

The French girl looked at the little house cuddling among its trees and gardens and a strange expression came over her face.

"It is little, of a certainty, yes," she agreed coldly. "The flowers are very bright. But are you not lonely—so far from habitations? It is the wilderness, is it not?" and she glanced about the smiling fields and winding roads with evident distaste.

Betsy was astounded. She had never dreamed that anyone could regard the dear little house with such a look of disfavor. She rallied bravely, however, for she was not easily daunted, and the spirit of her New England forebears was rising within her.

"Oh, it really isn't far from the other houses," she explained eagerly, as the surrey came to a halt before the gate. "The trees hide the other houses, you know. The church is just over the hill, and Mr. Simpson's house and the Timmins farm and lots of others are quite close. We like it because it isn't right in the village."

Amiee said nothing. She seemed to hold her own opinions, though, for she looked about, as she stepped down from the carriage, and her expression did not change. Betsy followed her as she went with Mrs. Hale into the house, and with every step she took her heart sank lower.

"She doesn't like anything," she said, noting the unchanged look of indifference with which the newcomer viewed the dear home things. "She looks perfectly bored to death. I hope Mother doesn't ask me to take her to her room, like we planned. I shan't know what in the world to say to her when we're alone."

She had to find words, however, when Mrs. Hale, pausing at the foot of the stairs, left her to lead Amiee up to the little room next

her own while her mother stopped behind to see to the luggage.

Betsy was in an agony of embarrassment for the moment.

"I ought to try to make her feel at home," she thought with a flash of pity for the desolate stranger.

It was strange how much more compassion she could feel for Amiee when she did not see her. As long as the newcomer was following her up the stairs, Betsy's heart melted in sympathy for her. She cleared her husky throat and tried to find words that might find their way to the right spot, but she delayed too long, for their feet were nimbler than her tongue and they were in the little cozy room with its cheerful dormer windows before a word was spoken.

Then Betsy faced about, meaning to say something that should make them friends at once, but when her eyes met those of Amiee, all her kind speeches fled completely. The French girl looked at her with the same stolid look with its touch of indifference that had so baffled Betsy before.

Still, it was necessary to talk. Betsy

moved to the closet, opening the door. "You can put your coat on the hanger here," she said boldly. "The little closet under the window is a good place for hats."

Amiee stood squarely on the rug before the dresser. She looked about her with a careful survey, saying never a word in response. She looked at the fresh white bed, at the dainty white curtains, at the flowers in the small green vase on the table. Then she turned to the mirror and began to take off her hat. It was very disconcerting.

Betsy's compassion had turned to disappointment and was taking on an edge that was very much like vexation, in spite of her pity for French orphans. "She might pretend to like *something*, just to be polite," she thought. "She isn't a bit like those poor, desolate orphans in the books."

Amiee calmly took off the crêpe hat with its crêpe streamer and then she looked with disfavor on the small ample closet under the window.

"It will discompose my new hat furniture," she said in her precise, slow speech. "I wish it not to be discomposed into shabbiness by squeezing."

Betsy's touch of vexation melted before the quaint phrases. She did not laugh, however. She merely showed Amiee how to bestow the treasured new hat with its floating trimming on the wide shelf in the low closet so that its "furnishings" should not be discomposed. She was quite serious about it, and she became more at ease with their guest.

"You'll find lots of room in the dresser and the chest there," she told her cheerfully. "Lucy will bring your things up pretty soon, I suppose, and you can change, if you want. The bathroom is down-stairs next to Mother's room. There's always plenty of hot water."

Amiee faced slowly about. "But I have already washed this day," she explained, "At the hotel this morning there was warm water and also cold water in the corner of the room."

Betsy felt she had made another blunder. "Oh, of course," she said hastily. "You look awfully neat. The trains are pretty clean, now that the windows are down. It's quite different in the summer."

She was glad that the sound of bumping broke in on her disjointed speech. Lucy was

bringing the two parcels under one arm and the valise in the other hand. It was a tight squeeze in the narrow stairway and she made a good bit of noise as she mounted the steps and crowded through the door. Amiee looked at her with a little frown. Betsy ran to help deposit the bundles safely on the bed.

"There, Miss, they're all there," said Lucy pleasantly. She, too, felt kindly to the orphan stranger.

She paused at the door, looking back into the room with a good-natured smile. "Is there anything else I can do for you?" she asked. "Want that I should open the grip for you?"

Amiee shook her head. She was fingering something in her pocket. "No, I thank you, I am not in need of you," she replied rather ungraciously.

And then she found what she wanted in her pocket, and she advanced to Lucy, holding out a coin in two fingers. "For the *baggages*," she said briefly.

Lucy put her hands behind her so swiftly that the coin dropped on the floor and rolled to Betsy's feet.

"I don't need to be paid," she snapped, and she slammed the door with a jerk and went hurriedly downstairs. Betsy could hear her heels clicking on the bare steps and the sound of the door below as she vanished into the lower regions.

Betsy stooped to restore the coin to Amiee. She felt very uncomfortable indeed. It was far from the scene she had planned. "Lucy didn't mean to be impudent, I am sure," she said earnestly as she laid the coin in Amiee's indifferent hand. "She's usually very good tempered. Something must have happened to upset her. I've never seen her like this before."

Amiee accepted the apology in absolute silence. She stood on the exact spot where she had tendered the coin to the indignant Lucy, and she looked at the wall beyond Betsy's head. It was evident that she wished to be alone.

Betsy hesitated for the fraction of a second and then she mustered all her courage.

She went over to Amiee and she took one passive hand in her own warm one. She leaned forward and kissed her heartily on the

dark cheek. "I'm awfully glad you have come," she said sweetly. "You mustn't feel lonely or unhappy, if you can help it, for we all want to make you comfortable."

And then she dropped the limp hand, and without another look at the unmoved face, she went swiftly out of the room, shutting the door carefully behind her.

She was conscious of a flush of elation as she released the knob. "I made my little speech, anyway," she thought, with a bird-like quirk of her brown head.

As she went down the stairs the flush died. She was very human, after all.

"She never budged an eyelash," she told herself hotly. "Her fingers were as limp as a fish."

At the door of her mother's room she paused. She decided not to go in. Instead she passed quickly down and out into the summer house, where Selma was waiting by previous arrangement.

Selma started up as Betsy's footsteps sounded on the flag-path. A disappointed look spread over her pretty face as she saw that Betsy was alone.

"Didn't she want to come out?" she asked, and her soft, slow voice was alive with interest. "Isn't she well or—what?"

Betsy stood in the door of the summer house. She held herself very erect. There was a strange expression about her lips.

"Selma Worthington," she said solemnly, "she's a soap image—that's what she is. And she perfectly despises the Wee Corner!"

Selma opened her eyes very wide. She wanted further particulars, however.

"Tell me just what she is like, though," she urged. "Does she look like any of the pictures in that new book? Is she——"

Betsy broke in with a hopeless gesture. "I can't tell you what she's like," she replied. "You'll have to see for yourself. But all I can say is that she's different from anyone I ever knew. She's made Lucy mad already, and she did it without saying two words. She regularly paralyzed me, and even Mother couldn't talk to her much. She sort of shuts you up without saying anything herself. It's awfully uncomfortable."

Selma gazed at the chrysanthemum buds in the nearby border. A pucker came into her smooth brow.

"I guess I won't stay, after all," she said, rising. "I'll come over and see you tomorrow."

Betsy watched her as she went out by the flag-path gate. She sighed as the latch clicked shut behind her. Then she shut her lips in a very firm line. She began to feel ashamed of her frankness.

"It will be worse than doing awfully hard work, to have that French orphan about all the time; but it's Mother's choice and whatever Mother does is perfectly right," she said to herself. "All I've got to do is to be nice to her, and I'm going to do it."

She turned to glance up toward the window of the guest room. Her slim, lithe figure was tense with determination.

"I'm going to be nice to her—if it kills me," she declared. "She shan't make Mother sorry she brought her here. I'll be so nice to her that she'll just have to thaw out."

## CHAPTER III

### First Impressions

BETSY went into the house with a quick step.

She ran up-stairs, meaning to begin her work of being nice at once. The door of the guest room was still closed, however, and though she hesitated outside for a long, uncertain minute, no sounds came from within.

"She's resting," she thought compassionately, and turned to her own room across the little landing.

It was remarkable how tenderly she felt towards their charge when Amiee was absent. It seemed as though her actual presence broke the pleasant thread of which her day-dreams had been spun. The web went briskly on in her absence, and Betsy smiled to herself as she left the closed door.

"She'll feel better after while," she said cheerfully. "It's all rather queer to her, no doubt, and she may not be used to girls."

Her own dear room looked very inviting to her. The dormer window where she had dreamed and planned and stuck in pins, too, sometimes, seemed to beckon to her. She would have liked to forget that there was a French orphan in the house and to have dropped on her knees beside the low sill to watch the long shadows of the tall pines creeping over the summer house roof. But she did not indulge herself.

The last slanting shaft of sunlight caught out the colors of a little flag pinned up on the wall at the foot of her bed, and she nodded at it, as though it had spoken to her. She looked at it thoughtfully, remembering the day she had pinned it there.

"I don't know whether thawing out French orphans is a ten-cent size job or not," she mused, staring at the little flag. "I suppose it must be, though. It's what I've got to do, anyway," and she sighed a bit in spite of herself. She had looked for such keen enjoyment in this French orphan that she simply couldn't help sighing a bit.

After she had smoothed her hair and re-tied her necktie she tiptoed across the landing for

another breathless moment of listening at the closed door. She was quite eager now to begin her work of being nice. There was no movement inside, however, and she was obliged to postpone her good intentions once again.

She ran down to find her mother in the sitting-room where a cheerful fire was crackling on the hearth and Mac was stretched comfortably on the rug. Mrs. Hale was sitting with her chin in her hand staring into the leaping flame, and Betsy thought she looked very serious. She thought she knew why, too.

"Amiee is going to be very nice when she knows us better," she said, slipping down on the rug beside the willing Mac. "It must be all dreadfully strange to her."

Mrs. Hale looked down at her with a sudden smile breaking through her serious look, and Betsy hurried on.

"She's quite generous, I think," she enlarged eagerly. "She wanted to pay Lucy for bringing her things up, and that was rather nice of her, don't you think? She is so poor, you know, and she must be kind, if she'll deny herself that way."

Mrs. Hale stroked the slender fingers that rested lightly on her knee. She seemed much relieved by Betsy's words. "No doubt she will feel very much out of place for the first few days," she said, "but we must do our best to help her become one of us. She will come around if we're only patient."

That was all that was said on the subject, for Lucy came in to announce supper, and Betsy had to run up and tap on the closed door and call cheerfully through the keyhole to Amiee to come down or the muffins would be cold, and then, without waiting for the brief reply, she had to skip down-stairs again and have Amiee's chair pulled out and ready for her, so that she might see how welcome she was to the first meal in her new home.

Mrs. Hale took her seat at the head of the table. Betsy stood with her eyes on the door. They were each intent on Amiee's entrance.

Steps sounded on the stair. They came through the sitting-room at no very rapid rate. It was evident that Amiee was not in a hurry. Betsy clutched the chair-back hard and the smile on her lips grew stiff with waiting, but she smiled bravely on until the French girl stood in the doorway.

"Come along, Amiee," she cried cordially. "We're all ready and waiting." She was more effusive than was her custom, for she was anxious to show her mother how friendly they were all going to be.

Amiee walked to the chair, giving the least possible bow in Mrs. Hale's direction. She sat down quickly, pulling the chair from Betsy's relaxed fingers. When she was seated and had picked up her napkin she spoke, ignoring Betsy entirely.

"I have packed away my clothings in the depository," she announced to Mrs. Hale. "Everything is ready for the inspection, whenever Madame designs to conduct it."

Mrs. Hale paused with the cream jug in her hand. A merry light danced in her eyes. "Mercy, Amiee, I'm not that sort of a person at all," she laughed. "I wouldn't think of inspecting anything. I'd make mistakes if I did. Show your things to Betsy here, if you want to, but don't expect me to play griffin over you. I have other things to do."

Amiee looked so surprised at the gay tone and the merry look that Betsy felt she had to explain that her mother was a writer and

that she was a very busy person indeed. Betsy was tremendously proud of her mother's abilities, so she was not prepared for the comment that her explanation evoked.

"Madame Koot told me that the American ladies spent much time writing suffrage papers for one another to read," she said, spreading her napkin carefully over her black lap. "It is a strange amusement," and then she turned her attention entirely to the plate before her, and although Betsy tried to attract her interest with suggestions for their Monday activities and Mrs. Hale talked in her most entertaining manner, not another sentence did she utter during the whole meal.

Betsy watched her with a sense of defeat. "She's going to be fearfully hard to be nice to," she thought ruefully, as she noted the stubborn set of Amiee's round head on her sturdy shoulders. "She won't smile a single bit. It wouldn't be so bad if she'd only smile."

Betsy's desire for a gleam of friendliness grew as the evening dragged slowly through. Amiee, when asked what she preferred to do, had no choice. Mrs. Hale was reading by the

fire in the sitting-room and the two girls sat by the table with books before them, while the clock's tick grew louder and louder with every passing minute.

Betsy had "St. Valentine's Day" to pore over, but even that old favorite lost its flavor. She peeped up constantly to watch the face opposite, hoping to catch some glimpse of the eyes that were so studiously hidden. Only twice did she have her wish.

Once Amiee looked up, directly at her. Her face was somber and her eyes unreadable. "Do you like living here?" she asked abruptly, and at Betsy's eager reply she dropped her face again to her book and went on with her reading.

The second time Betsy had almost forgotten her in the prison scene where the prince is being encouraged by the two girls in the garden, when she felt those dark, brooding eyes upon her again. She looked up to meet another abrupt question.

"How old are you?" asked the French girl.

"Fourteen, going on fifteen," responded Betsy promptly. She was glad of so much interest, and would have cheerfully furnished

"Do You Like Living Here?"

as much more information as anyone could wish.

Amiee returned to her book without another word, and that was the end of their conversation for the evening.

At half-past eight Betsy rose. "I'll go up and light your lamp," she told Amiee, and she slipped out of the room before there was any reply. She wanted to give the stranger a chance to have Mrs. Hale's kind "good-night" alone. She felt that if anything could make Amiee sleep well it would be that pleasant little ceremony.

She was barely on the second stair, however, before she heard the other girl's tread behind her, and Amiee was in the room before she had the match to the lamp. There was no trace of change in her expression.

"How do you make the window to close?" she asked, going to the open squares of blue star-light in a businesslike way.

"Oh, do you want them closed?" Betsy's surprise was evident. "I never shut mine at night. The air is so sweet."

Amiee examined the fastenings without hesitating. "I do not love the open windows.

They are of much coldness," she returned evenly, and she watched Betsy's deft fingers as she closed the casements, evidently meaning to help herself the next time.

Betsy felt a touch of embarrassment as she turned to say her good-night. She did not like to kiss Amiee again, and yet in her planning for the welcome of the desolate orphan the good-night kiss and cheerful little speech was a rather important factor. So she hesitated as she laid her hand on the door-knob.

"I hope you'll be comfortable," she said in a confused way. "I'm right across the hall, you know, if you should want me. And there are blankets in the closet."

She stopped, hoping that the other would help her by some show of comradeship. She thought Amiee ought to begin to get used to her new surroundings by this time. It seemed an eternity to poor Betsy since the afternoon.

Amiee merely nodded and stood silently by the dresser. She was evidently waiting for Betsy to be gone.

Betsy faltered for another moment. Then her cheeks flushed painfully. She was realizing how far below her own standard her actions

were. She drew a quick breath, went swiftly to the stolid Amiee and printed a hasty kiss on her lips.

"Good-night, and pleasant dreams," she said in a flurried way.

She went out, leaving Amiee standing on the mat before the mirror, looking after her with a little frown on her brow.

"There," said Betsy to herself as she gained the shelter of her own room, "I've done my part anyway."

She would not think about Amiee at that moment. She felt that she could not be fair to her. It was not until she had undressed and said her prayers that she allowed herself an opinion. She sank down on her knees by the open window and stared out into the starry dimness of the soft night. She did not speak for a while, but she breathed rather fast.

When she spoke it was in a whisper. "To think," she said tensely, "to think that we have to spend years and years and years with *her!*"

After another long breath she got up and went over to the little flag at the foot of her

bed. She knew exactly where it was in the darkness. She touched it with her lips. She was just high enough to reach it.

"I'm afraid I'm going to simply detest her, but I'll be nice to her—if I can," she promised bravely.

And then she crept into bed and fell asleep in a daze of uncomfortable thoughts. It was all so very different from what she had expected.

She was awakened in the morning by a sharp thudding sound. She sat up in bed, rubbing her eyes and wondering what was happening. It was fully a minute before she realized that someone was throwing little balls of kneaded earth against her window.

"It's Philip," she said joyfully. "He's heard about Amiee, and come over to hear things."

She was in her bathrobe and at the window in a jiffy, signaling him to silence with an imperative gesture. She did not want Amiee to hear.

"I'll be down right away," she breathed, hanging out to make him hear the low whisper. "Wait in the summer house!"

She was down in an incredibly short time. She found him deep in a hand-book on biology, but he looked up with his cheerful grin as she appeared.

"Sit down and turn on the gas," he invited. "I've heard that she's come. What sort is she? Got any spirits, or is she the limpy sort——"

Betsy interrupted with a puckered brow. "Don't ask me what she is like," she said. "You'll have to see for yourself. She isn't limpy, anyway," she ended, feeling that she was being very good. She had told Selma more than that.

He looked at her and whistled. "You aren't exactly crazy over her, are you?" he ventured. "When is she on exhibition? I came over with a bid, if your mother is willing."

"A bid?" questioned Betsy eagerly. Philip's plans were always fascinating to her. "A bid for what, Phil?"

"Picnic," he responded briefly. "I've an exam. this morning, but this afternoon the Prof. says I can have the old nag and the two-seated wagon, and I thought Deep Run would be a pretty good place."

Betsy allowed him to go no further. "Oh, I'm sure Mother would love to go," she cried briskly. "I'll go ask her this very minute. Wait for me, for I shan't be a second.

She was back again before he got out his book, and her face was beaming. "We'll all be ready," she cried gaily. "We'll take a lot of lunch and the fishing poles and——"

He got up to go. "Selma says she'll take the buggy, if you'd like," he said to her casually. "I'll drop in and tell her on my way back. Anyone else you want to ask?"

Betsy considered. Then she shook her head. "I'd love to ask Emma Clara," she said thoughtfully. "But perhaps Amiee had better get used to them one at a time."

Philip whistled again. "Phew! she sounds mighty queer," he commented "Well, just as you say. I'll be around with the Ark at one-thirty sharp. You can fix it up between you who goes with Selma. So long," and he was off over the fence and through the thicket.

Betsy turned to go into the house.

She stooped to pick a couple of asters for Amiee's breakfast plate. She choose two of

the biggest white ones she could find. She caught the whistle of a meadow lark from the fields beyond the highway, and the sweet notes sounded happily in her ears.

"It's going to be a lovely day," she thought, smiling. "Amiee will like it better today. Selma and Phil are such dears; she can't help having a good time with them."

And then she ran into the house with the flowers in her hand and a bright greeting on the tip of her tongue. She felt that everything was going very happily.

## CHAPTER IV

### Getting Under Way

BETSY came into the sunny breakfast room with the flowers and her bright look of welcome for Amiee, who was just seating herself at the table.

"Good morning, Mother and Amiee," she said gaily, as she laid the white blooms at the other girl's plate. "Isn't it a perfectly lovely day? It's as warm as midsummer. It will be glorious for our picnic this afternoon. Did Mother tell you we were going on a picnic?" she questioned Amiee, as she dropped into her own chair and shook out her napkin.

Mrs. Hale smiled over the cups at her end of the table, but Amiee showed no joy in the prospect before her. She was exactly the same as she had been the night before. She had changed her best dress for a plain white one, but her expression was not altered in the least.

"Yes, Madame has acquainted me with the

news," she said in her level voice. "I have not had the experience to make a picnic before. Is it a *fête chantant*?—what you call a café party, or is it——"

Betsy was so eager to explain that she broke in on the slow speech.

"It isn't like that at all," she said briskly. "It's having lunch out in the woods, and making the fire to cook on, and fishing, and all that. You'll like it tremendously, if you've never done it before."

Amiee turned her dark eyes to Mrs. Hale. "Is it of the propriety that I make the picnic with you?" she asked. "I am in the mourning, and it may not be of propriety."

Mrs. Hale assured her that the small expedition to Deep Run was not in any way a social affair, and that she was perfectly safe in going with them. "It is just the same as having Philip and Selma to lunch here with us," she explained. "No one else is going and we shall be as quiet as you like."

The slight cloud that had been apparent on Amiee's brow did not disappear. It seemed that she had some reluctance to the picnic, although she did not make any further inquir-

ies. She ate her breakfast silently and seemed absorbed in her own thoughts.

"She's going to be a perfect *blister* on a picnic," thought Betsy, watching her with lessening satisfaction.

Amiee finished her breakfast and rose with the others. She declined Betsy's offer of help with the task of straightening her room, and she went upstairs without one backward inviting glance. Betsy sighed again, looking toward her mother with troubled eyes. She wanted to talk things over with her, but Mrs. Hale shook her head, smiling.

"Run along and make your bed, Betsy-girl," she said quietly. "Lessons are due at ten, you know," and she went out to the kitchen to give some instructions for the day.

Betsy went upstairs in a dampened mood. The flowers she had picked for Amiee were withering on the cloth beside her empty plate. The door opposite her own was shut, and she heard Amiee slip the bolt as she reached the top step. "As though I'd poke in there," she thought hotly.

Her bed was made very well indeed that morning and her room, always neat, was a

model of precision. She put in a studious half hour on her Latin, and then she went downstairs for the lesson hour. The unbolting of the door behind her told her that their guest was following her, but she did not turn her head.

"Ma'mselle," called Amiee in a rather uncertain tone. "Ma'mselle Betsy!"

Betsy turned.

"May I demand the key?" asked Amiee. "I cannot find a key to this lock, though I have made search for it."

Betsy was genuinely surprised, although she would not show it more than she could help. "A key for your door?" she repeated, coming back quickly. "Why do you—" she broke off to say hastily, "There's a key somewhere for that lock, I remember seeing it when we were fixing the room for you."

She opened the door, rather to Amiee's annoyance, it seemed, and after glancing uncertainly about, she recalled the spot where she had seen the key. "It's in the bottom of the little closet," she said positively and started for the small cupboard under the window, where she had helped Amiee bestow her crêpe-laden hat.

Amiee was before her, and put an eager hand to fend her from the little door. "I can produce it immediately," she said in an agitated way, and she put her hand into the closet, still keeping the door slightly ajar so that the contents were invisible to Betsy. She had the key out in a second, and she shut the door with a snap.

"Thank you very much, Ma'mselle," she said in her usual voice, leading the way to the door. "It was most *facile*, was it not?"

Betsy had a sense of being almost pushed out onto the landing, while Amiee fitted the key to its lock, clicked the latch, and then dropped the key into her pocket. They were down-stairs in the sitting-room before she had time to wonder at the celerity with which the French girl had dispatched the matter.

"She can be quick enough when she wants," she thought with a tinge of amusement at the care which Amiee took of her shabby valise and paper parcels. "I wonder if she'll take to the lessons like that?"

It had been arranged that the newcomer was to share her studies with Betsy, and to make one of all their household occupations,

and Betsy had been looking forward to the lesson hour with some distrust. Would Amiee prove a clever scholar? Or would she be so far behind that it would be tiresome to have her for a companion in study? Betsy, after seeing her, had decided she would be dull, but the last few minutes had shaken her belief.

"There's no telling what she can do," she decided as she arranged her books. "She's more surprising than I thought she could be."

Surprising Amiee certainly was. She was far advanced in some studies, and showed a precocious cleverness that was disconcerting to the more normal Betsy. In other branches, however, she appeared indifferent and stupid. Betsy was glad when the morning was over. It was dispiriting work for one of her temperament.

Lunch was dispatched and fishing lines, baskets and wraps had been gathered together in a neat array inside the front gate, and they were waiting in the summerhouse, when Lucy came out with a rather odd expression on her ruddy face. She addressed herself to Mrs. Hale, though her eyes strayed to the dark, indifferent face opposite.

"Please, Mrs. Hale, I can't get in the young lady's room to clean that last window that was too late to be done of a-Saturday. The door's locked," she said and closed her lips primly.

Amiee flushed through her dark skin, but she did not open her lips. After a glance at her Mrs. Hale replied easily, "Never mind the window today. We will see about it tomorrow."

Lucy went back to her kitchen with a toss of her head, while Amiee looked out at the swaying pine branches with a quiet smile. It was the first time she had really appeared pleased since her arrival. Betsy stared at her in growing perplexity.

"She's queer," she thought. "Caring so much about locks and keys."

Then Philip arrived, and there was a stir and laughter, as there always was when Philip came. Betsy forgot their new friend's peculiarities in her delight at Philip's manner of welcoming the stranger to their festivity.

"Oh, how jolly!" she exclaimed as they hurried out to examine the streamers and festoons which decorated the old vehicle. "It

looks just like the carriages in our parade last summer. Where did you ever get so many French flags, Phil?"

Philip explained that he had borrowed them from the drug store and the hotel, "besides a couple of new ones I got in town," he added. "I didn't think I'd need them so soon, though."

Amiee was plainly impressed in his favor. She looked at the gaily decorated vehicle with brightening eyes. "It is the most belovable flag in the world, is it not?" she said, after the introductions had been made and they were busy with the bestowing of their baskets and other bundles. "It makes those others appear despicable to my eye."

It was not a very tactful speech under the circumstances, and Betsy's patriotic spirit rose hotly. She could not bear any disparagement to her own revered stars and stripes. Before she could find words Philip spoke, smiling good-naturedly on the blundering Amiee.

"Sure thing," he said heartily." "That's the way we all feel about our own flag. There's nothing like it. What do you want

done with this basket, Mrs. Hale? It's too big to go under the seat."

Mrs. Hale, who had not heard Amiee's speech nor his reply, turned a perplexed face. "Oh, is it too big?" she said, and then remembered. "That one is to go in the buggy with Selma. The flat one goes with us."

Selma's buggy was coming over the hill, and Betsy was growing anxious. "I'm going to ride with her," she pulled her mother aside to say. "I wonder if Amiee would like to go with us? The seat's wide enough for four."

In spite of her low tone Amiee heard. "If Madame allows, I shall go with her," she told them evenly. "I do not have the acquaintance of the young lady Selma."

Philip chuckled. Mrs. Hale smiled and nodded consent. Selma was drawing up at the gate and Betsy had no time for further speech. She was disappointed, but she tried not to show it. "She isn't so slow when it comes to anything she wants," she thought, as she picked up the big basket to stow it in the buggy by Selma's feet.

Then Philip came to her aid and swung the heavy hamper into place, while Selma was

being introduced to the newcomer and the usual pleasant speeches were being made. "She's a queer fish, isn't she?" he whispered with a grin. "I bet she'll make things hum—when she wants to."

Betsy's good humor returned in a flash. She didn't mind now that Amiee had chosen to desert her. Her pride in Philip's clever judgment wiped out her own disappointment. She became her usual generous self.

"She's strange yet," she whispered back. "It's pretty hard to be an orphan, and so far from home, too."

They were ready to start, when Philip's "Golly, I forgot," called a halt to the little procession. He clambered out on the shafts and, reaching up, began to take down some of the decorations. "I didn't mean to drive you people about the roads in this shape," he said sheepishly. "It was just a bit of fun, you know."

He had folded one of the American flags neatly and was taking down a French standard when Amiee spoke sharply:

"It is not fitting to lower the flag of an ally," she told him with a dark flush. "My flag

should not insult itself thus. You do not well to take down that emblem."

Philip was too much astonished for reply. He halted involuntarily for a second, while the dark eyes opposite him sparkled with anger and Amiee's foot tapped the floor with impatience. Mrs. Hale came to the rescue with her gentle voice.

"Philip is taking down *all* the flags, my dear," she said, with a significant gesture to the hesitating Philip. "We do not wish to make our country's flag a mere decoration for a picnic wagon. Philip has welcomed you very nicely with his pretty banners, but their usefulness is over now."

It was a very good way out of the difficulty. Philip, much relieved, briskly plucked the banners from their conspicuous places and Amiee, seeing this, appeared to be satisfied. After the carriage had been stripped they started again.

"She's pretty peppery, isn't she?" said Selma in a low tone. She seemed much impressed. Her mild eyes were wide and startled.

Betsy settled down comfortably beside her

friend. It was very pleasant to be riding with Selma through the warm sunny afternoon. The other carriage disappeared over the hill, and Dolly's leisurely "clip-clop, clip-clop" made a rhythmic accompaniment to the rattle of the wheels.

"It's because she feels strange, you see," she explained with a little laugh at the memory of Philip's puzzled look. "Of course she feels very strongly about her flag. Everyone does, you know. It's right to care about it terribly."

Selma mused for a while. Then she said in her slow, soft voice, "She's pretty peppery, I guess. Just being strange wouldn't make her snap people up like that. Tell me all about her. We've lots of time, for I simply can't make Dolly go. She's such a poke!"

Betsy leaned back in the cushiony seat and tried to give Selma a true picture of all that had occurred since Amiee's advent. There really was not much to tell, particularly when she suppressed the item about the bolt and key, which she somehow felt was not to be made public.

Selma listened with serious attention.

"Well," she said when Betsy had ended. "Well, it's my belief that she's not going to be much of an addition to our doings here. French ways are peppery, I think."

Betsy stared ahead down the long incline where the two-seated wagon was moving briskly along in its little cloud of dust. She seemed to be thinking very hard. As the wagon turned into the picnic ground she flung up her head with a laugh.

"She may be peppery as you say, Selma, but there are three of us, not counting Mother. It will be very odd indeed if we can't help her to get over it. She'll come around after while, see if she doesn't."

Selma steered Dolly in through the open bars after the other team. Her pretty pink face was unconvinced. "I'll wait till I see how she acts," she insisted with gentle obstinacy. And then she added, "She isn't a bit like any of us."

It was that speech that stirred Betsy's sympathy for Amiee.

"No, she isn't," she agreed, with her eyes growing soft and tender. "She's been through so much more terrible things than we've ever

known. Poor Amiee, I am going to make her happy today, though, if I possibly can."

Selma pulled Dolly to a halt.

"If you can," she repeated thoughtfully. "That's it—if you can."

Betsy was impatient of so much distrust.

"Just you wait and see," she said impetuously, as she poised on the step to jump out. "I'll show you that I can do it. Wait and see."

## CHAPTER V

### Betsy Does Her Best

"NO, many thanks, Madame, I do not prefer to fish," Amiee said. "I like not at all the serpents on the hook."

Philip snickered and Selma giggled. Betsy was the only one who did not laugh. "I think the worms are horrid, too," she said quickly. "But Philip always puts them on the hook for us. You'd better come, Amiee. It's great fun in the boat."

Amiee shook her head. "Unless Madame insists, I stay on the land always," she replied very firmly.

It was plain she did not intend to be persuaded. Betsy resigned herself to her fate.

"I'll stay with you then," she announced briskly. "Selma can go out with Philip, and we'll watch them from this rock. Mother is going to take a rest in the carriage, but we won't disturb her here."

It took very little persuasion to urge Selma to the delightful task of helping Philip with the boat. It was surprising how gay they were about it, and about the bestowal of the bait cans and the fishing rods. Betsy thought she had never heard Philip laugh so often or seen Selma in such high spirits, but that may have been because her own situation was so far from diverting.

Amiee sat dutifully beside her on the broad rock, after Mrs. Hale had settled down with her book in the nearby carriage, and they watched the boat make its way out into the middle of the broad, shallow stream. The horses, tied to the branches in the grove, cropped the grass. The lap of the water on the rocks sounded lazy and inviting. All about them was the flutter of leaves in the soft breeze and the flicker of sunshine on grass and rock and water.

Betsy would have liked to sit and dream away the bright hour, but she had a weighty sense of her responsibility to their guest. When the laughter and splash of oars had died into the distance and the boat became indistinct among the drooping willows

upstream, she began her task of entertainment.

She talked very hard and very cheerfully. She told Amiee about the hospital, and Miss Willie, about the Bonds and the mysterious Major; she described Emma Clara in her old home and in her new state of "Mrs. Doctor;" she enlarged on the cure of Mr. Si Myers, and she really enjoyed the work after she warmed up to it.

Amiee sat with her dull dark eyes fixed on the shimmering water, never saying a word unless a question was put directly to her. She hardly seemed to listen to Betsy's cheerful chatter. She kept her eyes fixed on the shady reaches where the boat had disappeared. There was a shade of discontent on her dark face.

"It's pretty hard to make her have a good time," thought Betsy, noting the look. "She doesn't want to do anything—even talk."

Just as she formed the thought the boat came drifting out of the willow shadows, and Selma, at the stern, waved gaily to them. She was holding up a small glittering object on a string.

"Oh, she's got a fish!" cried Betsy, well pleased. She liked to see some results from action, and her own efforts in the last hour had been very disappointing. Selma's success delighted her.

As the boat drew near she ran down on the pebbly shore to help pull in the tie-rope. The fish looked larger as it came close. "Oh, what a beauty!" she said heartily. "It's big enough to cook. What fun!"

Selma stepped out on the pebbles, smiling and pleased. Betsy was always so nice about other people's luck, she thought. "Philip had to help me pull him in," she explained proudly. "I couldn't have held him a minute by myself."

Philip stood up in the boat, pushing with the oar to keep it steady. "It's a dandy, isn't it?" he said. He, too, was much pleased with Selma's triumph, and he looked after her with a cock of his curly head as she ran off to show her trophy to Mrs. Hale.

"It's the biggest catty we ever caught here," he boasted. Then, swinging the boat about to fasten it, he paused. "Anyone want to go out for a bit?" he asked with a look at

Betsy. He did not mean she should miss all the fun.

Amiee stepped forward. "I shall now fish," she announced calmly. "I did not know it was like that."

Betsy almost laughed out loud at Philip's face as he helped Amiee into the boat, but she managed to smother her mirth, and she stepped lightly in after the slower girl. She was happy in the prospect of merely being out in the boat.

"I won't fish this time," she told Philip when he baited a line. "I'll take the oars and you can tend to Amiee. She doesn't know how to fish, you know."

He merely grunted, but when he had the boat upstream among the willow shadows again, he dutifully changed seats with Betsy and began his instructions, showing Amiee how to throw the line into the rippling depths, and how to play it out as they drifted along. There was no need to caution Amiee not to talk—at least, at first.

They drifted along silently for a while. Betsy, with the oars idle under her hands, watched the rippling reflections of the white

clouds on the water. "It's like floating on the sky itself," she thought dreamily. She forgot the others as she watched the glittering, blue-washed water at the boat's side.

After a while she became conscious that they were talking. The boat had drifted far into a little sheltered cove and Amiee's line was tied to the thwart. Philip was still fishing, but without hope, apparently, for he did not interrupt Amiee's recital.

"Why, she's actually talking of her own accord," thought Betsy with an inward laugh. "How did Phil ever do it?"

She caught the last sentence: "And then they took her away, and I have the belief that she was transported to London or America. I have the positiveness that she yet lives." Then Amiee saw that Betsy was listening eagerly, and she turned grudgingly. "It is my father, whom they had told me was dead in the trenches," she explained. But Betsy was still more puzzled.

"You're an orphan, though, aren't you?" she asked bluntly. "They told Mother your mother and father both were—" she stopped dismayed at herself.

Amiee did not appear to be hurt. "They told me I was an orphan, by means of my father in the trenches," she replied evenly. "They told me also likewise that my mother did die of the fever. But I do not believe it. She was not in that London where I sought her, but I shall have news of her in this America yet."

She looked so positive that Betsy was much impressed. "But she would have tried to find you before this" she said doubtfully. Then brightening, she added, "Lets tell Mother right away."

Amiee looked earnestly at her. "But the Madame Koot warned me most certainly that I must be secret about my affairs, and your mother may have the anger that I am not a two-sided orphan, as was described in the letter to her," she replied. "It has been too long a time. Madame Warren assured me *ma mère* would have returned had she lived."

Betsy was on fire with interest. "You just tell Mother all about it," she cried, tugging away at the oars. "She'll soon find whether it's true or not. We don't want you to be an orphan a minute longer than you have to."

Amiee was uneasy. She seemed to regret her confidence. "But the young lady Selma," she protested. "I like it not that she share my affairs. It is a mistake of me to speak like this."

Both Philip and Betsy joined in promises that eased her greatly. "We'll keep mum as long as you tell us to," Philip told her. "You'd best tell Mrs. Hale, though, for she can help you, you know."

When they stepped out on the pebbly beach Betsy's eyes were dancing. She left Amiee to help Philip with the boat if she could, and she ran over to the carriage where Selma was sitting with Mrs. Hale.

"We've had a lovely time," she said joyfully. "Aren't we going to begin to get the fire ready for that fish, Selma? And, oh, Mother dear, Amiee is beginning to like things a wee bit, I do believe. You ought to talk to her *now!*"

She felt very crafty to thus separate Selma from the others, bringing her mother and Amiee together in the most natural way. "She'll tell her right away," she thought, with great satisfaction as she led Selma

hastily off to the grove to pick up sticks for the fire.

"Things are getting interesting, aren't they?" she said gaily, as she got a bundle of dry sticks together.

Selma had a different point of view. The half hour in the carriage had made her drowsy. "Oh, I don't know," she answered absently. Her whole attention was on the dry twigs at her feet.

After she had collected an armful she looked at Betsy with a sudden recollection. "I guess you've been making her enjoy herself," she said shrewdly. "You're always cocked up when you've done what you said you would."

Betsy laughed out loud. "No, I haven't either," she answered truthfully. "I couldn't do it, after all. And I tried pretty hard, too."

Selma continued to look at her sparkling face. "Well, something's happened to please you, anyway," she said placidly. "I guess we're going to have a better time than you thought."

They did have a very good time, although Amiee was very quiet and Betsy was on pins and needles to know whether she had spoken

to Mrs. Hale as she had been advised. Mrs. Hale looked exactly as usual, however, and there seemed to be no understanding between her and Amiee, as Betsy thought there would be if Amiee had spoken.

"She's awfully quiet, isn't she?" she whispered to Selma, who had caught her staring unusually hard at their new friend.

Selma nodded. "She's different from anyone I know," she said easily. "She is so sort of slow and yet so quick when you aren't expecting it. I guess it's being in the war and having things happen afterward that makes her so different. Maybe she'll get more comfortable after a while when she really knows us."

Betsy hoped so with all her heart. She did not see any immediate signs of any great change in Amiee, however, though she watched with eager care. When Philip dug the shallow circular hole for the oven and Betsy thought Amiee was wondering what his digging was for, she went over to Amiee's elbow and said pleasantly:

"Philip knows just how to do things right, doesn't he? He always digs the oven just so,

and then when the corn and potatoes are put in and the earth is smoothed over them, and the fire is made on top of it all, the vegetables cook evenly, and they all get done at once. They're awfully good, too."

She was disappointed to note that Amiee's eyes had strayed before the end of her little speech, and that the oven with its tempting cookery did not appear to interest Amiee at all.

Again, when Selma was helping Mrs. Hale set the table and Betsy and Amiee were sent to rummage for late wild flowers to deck the cloth, Betsy thought she might strike a spark by an inquiry about the missing mother. "Did —does your mother have dark eyes, too?" she asked in as tender and sympathetic a tone as she could manage for her eagerness. "Do you look like her or like your father?"

Amiee stooped to pick a red leaf before she answered slowly, "I am like my father. I shall be short like him when I am fully grown. I am taller than you are, nevertheless. You will always be small and thin, I think."

If Amiee had planned to turn Betsy's mind from questioning, she had succeeded admirably, for the term "thin" was rather con-

temptuously spoken, and Betsy felt that Amiee, had she more command of the language, might have said "skinny." That was what her tone implied. Betsy did not think much of herself or her appearance, or she would have known that her slender, graceful quickness of body was one of her chief charms. She only felt that the heavier Amiee despised her flexible slimness and she felt hurt for the moment.

"She's quite as vexing as Selma thought at first," she told herself hotly as she, too, stooped to gather a fading bit of belated purple aster. "She likes to say snippy things and make one feel cross."

By the time she had snapped the dry stem of the aster she remembered the reason for Amiee's caustic temper, and she flashed up a smile at the dark face beside her.

"I am rather small," she confessed with a little laugh, and she did not venture any further questions, for a great wave of pity for the bereaved orphan swept over her, and she felt that any inquiries she could make would only seem like prying, since Amiee did not invite further confidence.

She gathered the flowers that were left in the sheltered places and, chatting happily, she led Amiee back to the spot where the picnic supper was laid. "I'll wait till she's had a good chance to talk to Mother," she thought, "and then I'll ask Phil. He'll know whether she has told. He always sees things that I miss, somehow." And she gave herself up to the joys of the hour.

In spite of Amiee's quiet indifference, they had a very jolly time, and Betsy enjoyed every minute of it. She had the satisfaction of seeing Amiee smile a number of times as the picnic progressed and of actually hearing her laugh out loud once, and although Amiee lapsed immediately into her usual stolid manner, Betsy felt that the future was not quite so hopeless as before.

Amiee had smiled at Philip's speeches. Betsy unconsciously noticed that Selma and her own bright sayings did not appear at all humorous to the French girl. It was when they were waiting for the last touches to be put on the supper that Amiee laughed aloud, and it was at Philip's actions again.

The vegetables had been taken from their

steaming oven beneath the smaller fire, the coffee—a picnic treat for all—was sending out delicious fragrance from a hot stone by the fire and Mrs. Hale and Selma were finishing the exciting task of frying the thin, curling slivers of pink ham. Everything was at the very point of completion, when a cry from Mrs. Hale startled them all.

She stood transfixed, with the fork lifted above the pan and an expression of acute concern on her pretty face. "Oh, my new sailor!" she cried in distress. "My new, lovely sailor hat! She's eating it—she's eating it!" Betsy, startled, looked where the fork pointed, and her heart pounded.

"Oh, the horrid, horrid thing!" she murmured, but she did not stir. She was too much afraid of cows to budge.

For it was a cow, a big brindle cow with a long tail, that had come unseen from the neighboring thicket and was nosing the new hat on the discarded pile of wraps and baskets. She seemed in doubt as to whether it was really as good as it looked, for she did not at once begin to chew the straw rim that she smelled so earnestly.

"Oh, the horrid, horrid thing!" breathed Betsy in real terror. Nothing would have gotten her to move. She was quite paralyzed with fright.

Then in the same breath she added another "Oh" in quite a different tone, for she saw in that instant Philip, who was nearest the marauder, fly to the rescue of the hat. He was not at all afraid of cows, it seemed.

Down the slope he rushed, waving his arms and shouting with a suddenness that was amazing to the leisurely cow, who had barely time to look up when he was almost upon her. She did look up, however, and took one step, and it was then that Amiee laughed out loud.

Philip, in his eagerness, shot down the incline with such speed that the slippery grass was like a toboggan, and at the bottom he flew straight across the little level, landing against the brindle sides of the amazed cow!

Betsy cried out, but Amiee laughed aloud! And in a moment everyone else was laughing, too. For the cow, frightened and frantic, flung up her head with a wild bellow and took to her heels with a speed that was amazing.

She did not stop to see whether her assailant was pursuing, but she crashed away through the underbrush, tail erect and nostrils flaunting, too terrified to know where she was going.

After she had disappeared into the depths of the thicket and Philip had picked up himself and the sailor hat, it was found that neither had sustained any injury, and the supper was served amid much merriment and teasing. Amiee alone lapsed into her usual quiet state. But Betsy had heard her laugh and she was more hopeful of the interview between her mother and the newcomer.

As the meal went on she edged over to Philip, who was her next-door neighbor at the feast.

"Did she tell Mother while I was away or when she was helping her with bread and butter a bit ago?" she asked in a low tone. "Has she done it yet?"

Philip shook his head.

"Never piped a note after you left," he returned in the same whisper. "She's a queer fish, isn't she? She seems sort of afraid of people. I guess she can't get up her nerve to talk much at a stretch. We'll have to give her time."

Betsy nodded. She was easily satisfied. She knew that there was plenty of time ahead of them. "She can talk to her after we get home," she thought comfortably. "There'll be a whole hour and a half till bed-time."

She gave herself up to real enjoyment after that, and they finished their very early supper with the last long rays of the red sunset on their happy faces, while Philip laughed and teased and Selma chattered softly in their usual jolly way. They packed the things into the wagons,. and then Philip got the horses into the shafts and with the girls' help soon had them ready for the homeward journey. Mrs. Hale was to ride with Selma, and the others, in the larger wagon, were to lead the way.

As they drove out into the road again, the twilight was falling and the afterglow reddened the tranquil sky. Betsy looked back at the buggy to wave a gay hand, and then she settled down on the back seat alone, well content with the afternoon's excursion.

All along the pleasant twilight road, while the glow faded and the stars came out far up overhead, she was thinking of the interesting

disclosure that was to be made after they had reached home. "Mother will just love to help," she thought. "And she'll be so nice about it, too. She always understands."

When they reached the Wee Corner and the baskets and things were deposited on the grass inside the palings, she bade a hasty good-night to Philip, who was lingering to see that Selma's buggy reached the Worthington stable safely, and she fairly strained her arms lifting the big basket out of the buggy while her mother was alighting. She was in such a hurry for them to be gone and give Amiee her chance.

"I'll bring in the basket, Mother," she called eagerly. "Amiee can help you with the wraps. She'll want to talk it all over, I think."

She felt she had been very crafty indeed, and she smiled to herself in the darkness. For the life of her, though, she could not forbear cocking her ear to catch the words that began to tumble from Amiee's lips as she went up the gravel path with her kind hostess.

Betsy's smile clouded and she frowned a

bit as she heard the words distinctly. Amiee was not making good use of her time. She was saying something that was perfectly silly, according to Betsy's flurried mind.

"She's actually asking for a garden bed of her own," thought Betsy, disappointed beyond words. "What a waste of time!"

Amiee was asking for a garden bed, and was specifying the spot where she wanted it. "At the side of the house, Madame," she was saying in quite an eager voice. "I should desire it of all things. A very little spot will suffice."

Mrs. Hale laughed good naturedly. "It's rather late for gardening, my dear," she replied, "but if it gives you any pleasure you may dig the entire side grassplot. It's rather out of sight, though. Your garden won't show much, I am afraid."

Amiee's voice sounded relieved. "I am grateful, Madame," she said with more feeling than Betsy had heard her use. "I shall begin my spade practice tomorrow."

That was all that was said. Amiee went up-stairs almost at once. She seemed agitated when she found that she had mislaid her key, but when it was discovered in the

pocket of her serviceable petticoat she fairly laughed in relief. "I am forgetting myself because of the picnic fête," she said, lifting it out and fitting it in the lock. "I placed it there for the safety," and then, with a brief good-night, she went quickly in and closed the door.

Betsy stood for a moment looking at the door panels. There was a pucker of perplexity on her forehead. "She's very strange," she thought. "I never saw so strange a girl—with her keys and gardens and all that. I wonder why she didn't tell Mother? I gave her plenty of chance."

She turned to her own door.

"Well," she said with a little laugh, "I did my best, even if it didn't amount to much. I'll try again in the morning. And I'll ask her why she wants a garden at this time of year."

## CHAPTER VI

### Amiee and Her Garden

BETSY had little satisfaction from her questions to Amiee the next morning.

"I want to be out of doors while the autumn makes itself so warm," she replied to Betsy's interrogation. "I like it well to dig in the earth."

That was all there was to be said on the matter. Betsy gave it up.

"I have thought of the matter of my mother," went on Amiee evenly, "and I have come of the opinion that it is best to speak no more of her. I have dreamed a dream about her, and I wish no more sayings on her death or life."

Betsy shut her lips tight. She did not want to seem unfeeling, but she had no patience with dreams and superstitions.

"You will tell that young gentleman, Philip, what I say?" she demanded, with her dark eyes straight on Betsy's clear blue ones. "I

wish no more of talk of my mother. I think Madame Koot knew well what she told Madame. It is that I am orphaned for really."

Betsy promised, though her heart sank. If there was to be no pleasant mystery about the somber Amiee, it was going to be hard to keep up interest in her. However, she managed to impart her conviction to Philip that Amiee was very much in earnest about the matter, and was somewhat comforted by that cheerful youth's indifference to the whole affair. He was deep in his examinations for the Preparatory School and had only a very fleeting interest in Amiee and her concerns.

"It would have been fun for you, of course," he said, as he slung his books together to go. He had been studying in the summer house while Betsy finished a problem she had flunked on that morning. Amiee was up-stairs in her locked room, and it was almost as though she were not in the Wee Corner at all.

"It would have been fun for you," he repeated from the step. "She isn't exactly what you'd call a thriller. But you'll get used to her in time. I'll be back tomorrow and tell you how I get on. So long."

Betsy watched him vault the palings and disappear. She felt very sorry to see him go. Selma was at school now from nine until two, and her careful hours of study, with the small occupations at home, took her still more from Betsy.

"French orphans aren't so very exciting, after all," she sighed, as she went slowly back to the house. "I wonder if they're all like Amiee?"

The click of her mother's typewriter was sounding as she went up-stairs. There was no hope in that quarter. Amiee's door was locked and her invitation to a walk was curtly refused. "I'm tired," said Amiee through the door. "I will repose myself until your return." Betsy pinned on her hat with a scornful face.

"She needs a garden pretty badly, I think," she confided to the girl in the glass. "She simply sticks in that room every minute of the day. Lucy can't ever get in there to clean that window. She'll be sick if she keeps it up like this."

She would not go to Emma Clara's in her discontented mood, and so she made her way

to Miss Willie's tangled garden, and sat beside the well in the flicker vine-leaves and with the sweet smell of the tall ferns coming up on every breath that stirred. It was a long time before she was serene enough to fancy that she saw the Nickleman come dripping up to the well-curb to begin one of those imaginary conversations she had with him. She enjoyed it when it began, however. Perhaps all the more for its contrast to Amiee's stolid silences.

When she rose to go she smiled and waved her hand to the crinkling water in the depths of the old well. Her face, broken into vivid pieces by the motion of the leaf-stirred water, laughed up at her in the old way. She went out of the gate well pleased. "When Miss Willie comes home for good and all," she planned happily, "I'll see the Inner Court again."

She fell to planning other things as she went home over the thick clover fields of the short cut. She was recovering from the damper of Amiee's indifference and was her own eager self again. She thought of the talk in the boat yesterday and a sudden resolve formed in her active mind.

"I'll try to find Amiee's mother myself," she said with a quirk of her head. "I don't know how I'll begin, but I'm going to do it, and I shan't breathe a word to a living soul."

She was so elated by her secret resolve that she did not lose her spirits even though Amiee appeared at the dinner table in the same indifferent mood as before, and Mrs. Hale, deep in a new thought for her next day's work, hardly spoke during the meal. She talked cheerfully through the evening, too, and was quite well pleased with her project, even after she viewed it by the light of her own bedroom candle.

"I'll go very quietly about it," she said to herself. "And oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could find her mother for Amiee?"

As she blew out the light she added, happily: "It isn't so awfully bad to have a French orphan in the Wee Corner, after all."

The plan brightened the next few days, although nothing definite formed in her mind. It gave flavor to the rather monotonous companionship of Amiee and added zest to the daily round of lessons. Betsy felt she could take her time to arrange the manner of her

search for Madame LaLanne. She wanted to be quite sure she was beginning in the right way.

"I think," she said to herself as she stood at her window in the sunset glow a day or two after her visit to the Nickleman. "I think I shall write to Helen Bond and ask her to find out if Major Gordon had heard of any French people who have come over this summer. He knows everything that's going on. Helen can keep a secret, too. But I won't tell her who it is I want to look for. Not yet, anyway, I'll——"

She broke off as she saw down on the sun-flushed grass below her window a shadow pass. She leaned out to see Amiee with a spade going swiftly to the other side of the house. Betsy chuckled to herself as she drew back.

"That's a queer notion of gardening," she said to herself. "Starting in at almost dark to dig a flower bed in October. She's a funny girl. I suppose she'd be cross if I spoke about it, though."

The temptation to tease Amiee was great, but when she met her before dinner coming up to wash the soil from her hands, she said

not a word about her ill-timed gardening. "I'm going to be perfectly sweet to her," she said, as she got out fresh towels for her from the bath-room closet. "I mustn't forget that she may be a real orphan after all."

Her new resolution helped her wonderfully that evening, and she was still revolving it in her mind when she went up to bed. Amiee had wished to retire early, pleading fatigue. "From spading up that flower bed in a hurry, when she isn't used to work," thought Betsy. "If she'd stir about more, instead of sitting locked up in her room, she'd do better."

Betsy got out her writing materials after she had closed her door. She was going to write the letter to Helen Bond, and she was glad she had plenty of time for the task. She found it rather more of an undertaking than she had expected, and she had filled five large sheets before the matter was accomplished. She sealed the envelope with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I'll drop it in myself tomorrow," she said, yawning. "I've made a beginning, anyway."

She blew out the light and dropped on her knees by the window, thinking of all that

might come of that bulky envelope. She was so absorbed in her imaginings that she had no idea how the time fled. Everything was very quiet in the house below. The wind had risen with the young moon, but it was dying again as the bright silver crescent dropped to the horizon.

Suddenly a creaking sound made Betsy's heart stand still.

It was outside of her door and it sounded as though someone were on the stair. She was so startled for the moment that she could not stir. Before she could gain the use of her feet the sounds died away and all was still again.

"It was the wind," thought Betsy, relieved and practical. "It makes queer sounds sometimes."

Then she though it might have been her mother coming up for help in another fainting spell such as she had had last summer. That brought her to her door like a flash. "Oh, if she were ill again!" she breathed.

The stair was quiet when she looked down. The light in the bath-room threw a ray across the hallway. She could see her mother's door

ajar and, stealing part of the way down, could hear her even, soft breathing.

"She's all right," she said thankfully, and then she crept back to her own room, convinced that she had heard only the stirring of the wind. "Old houses always creak," she thought. "I remember how the kitchen used to purr when the March wind blew."

She knelt by the window for a while, enjoying the sounds of the rustling leaves. The church clock struck and she counted. Twelve o'clock!

She slipped out of her clothes and was getting into bed when another sound caught her ear. It was unmistakable. Someone was digging under her window!

She sprang from bed and flew to the dormer window. The grassy level beneath was empty in the faint setting moonlight. She stared and rubbed her eyes. Then she started again. The sound came from the other side of the house.

"It's—it's in Amiee's flower bed," she gasped, straining out to see.

The window-sill almost cut her in two and she stared with all her might, but all that she

could see was the corner of the house. The flower bed was around the corner. She drew herself inside. Her mind was in a riot. She had no explanation of the sound.

"Unless Amiee has gone crazy with grief, and is digging in the moonlight," she flashed. "Selma says they're always worse in moonlight, too."

While she was standing in the middle of the floor hesitating as to what she should do, she distinctly heard the front door lock click. Instantly she was at her door again, peering out, ready to fling herself downward to protect her sleeping mother's open doorway, if need be.

She had a shock when, after an interval, when the wind blew a fitful farewell, a short square figure in a familiar cloak appeared in the strip of light from the bath-room door.

It was Amiee herself!

Betsy drew her door to a crack and then waited to see that the figure did not pause at her mother's door. It came straight up towards the landing, where she peeped through the tiny crack of her door. A pause while the hidden hands fumbled for the key, then the

slightest rattle of a lock turning, a soft, hurried closing of the opposite door, and the landing was empty and Betsy was alone again.

She listened for a moment, hearing nothing now save the beating of her own heart and Lucy's heavy breathing from the back bedroom. Then she softly crept over to the opposite door and tied the girdle of her bathrobe firmly to the knob. When she closed her own door the stout twisted cotton rope was shut tightly into the crack, and the end was fastened firmly to Betsy's bedpost.

"She's a lunatic, after all," she said as she knelt down for her belated prayers," and I'm not going to have her getting out and doing damage if I can help it."

Then she slipped into bed and in spite of her excitement began to feel drowsy. "I'll watch till the clock strikes again," she thought, "and then I'll—I'll—I'll——"

She never finished her threat, for in about two minutes she was fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Doctor's Verdict

WHEN Betsy awoke the next morning she had her hand on the tight cord at the bedpost. Her first thought was of Amiee.

"I mustn't let her out till I can watch her," she thought, tumbling out of bed. "There's no knowing what she may do."

She softly undid her door and tiptoed downstairs. Her mother's room was closed and, early as it was, the typewriter was at work. Betsy knew that meant the bolt was in its place. "She's safe, anyway," she thought, well content.

She splashed through her bath with one ear on the floor above. She was in her own room again and dressing hurriedly before the clock over the hill boomed out the hour. "Seven," she counted, and thanked her stars that Amiee was usually a late riser.

As soon as she was fully dressed, she undid

the rope from her bed-head and crept over to the opposite door and, with deft fingers, she noiselessly undid the knot. Then she went back to her own room and sat down on the chair nearest the open door.

"I'll see that she doesn't get away from me this morning," she said with a firm lip. "She may be perfectly raving by this time, though she's wonderfully quiet for a crazy person."

About twenty minutes later she began to hear sounds in Amiee's room. At first her agitated imagination magnified them into gruesome noises, but soon her common sense came to the front. "She is just as quiet as ever," she thought, listening to the subdued splash of water from the bowl. Amiee had her washstand and pitcher to herself. "She must be one of the creepy sort."

When the door opened and the French girl came out on the landing Betsy started up in genuine surprise. She had been expecting a wild-eyed Amiee, even after her common-sense verdict. She thought she had never seen Amiee so quiet and contented looking. She actually smiled at Betsy sitting in her watchful chair.

"It is a morning of much pleasantness, is it not?" she said, and she came over to Betsy's doorway, leaving her own door unlocked. Betsy could see the neatly turned down bed covers through the crack.

Betsy jumped up and went closer. She was not going to be thrown off her guard by assumed sociability. "Are you quite well this morning?" she asked with a searching look. She thought Amiee looked different somehow, but she could not decide just what the difference was. Lunatics were hard to deal with when they were of this sort.

Amiee opened her somber eyes wide. She appeared uneasy for a second. Then she turned and went calmly downstairs. "I am more well than since the arrival of myself in your America," she said, and her voice sounded as though she meant it.

"She's awfully cunning," thought Betsy as she followed her. "But I shan't leave her out of my sight until I see how she behaves toward Mother. It isn't safe, for all her smiles."

It was not a hard task to keep Amiee in view. She went quietly to the sitting-room

and took up a magazine, settling herself to wait for Mrs. Hale's appearance for breakfast. Betsy, at the side window, was almost impatient of her calm exterior. It did not match with that moonlight escapade of last night.

She stood twiddling the string of the window-shade and casting furtive glances at the absorbed Amiee from time to time. A gust of wind shook the leaves from the dogwood tree against the window and she looked out with a start. She was on edge for startling sensations. She saw only Mac, however, and he was sauntering about the side grass-plot, without any apparent object in life.

As her gaze went back to Amiee she gave a start. Amiee was looking out of the window over the pages of her book, and her face changed from calm to sudden anger.

"That *mechant* brute-beast!" she cried shrilly, and was out of the house in a twinkling.

Betsy, at her heels, saw Mac industriously beginning a hole in the fresh earth where the mysterious gardening had taken place. She saw Amiee rush upon him with vigorous cuffs and slaps. She saw Mac retreat, astonished and dismayed and Amiee fall on her knees

beside the damaged bed, smoothing the earth into place with her hands.

"He is of the blackest heart! He chooses to expose me!" she cried, and Betsy was alarmed to see how she was trembling.

"She's quite mad," she thought, in a fright. "Oh, how dreadful it will be!"

Amiee seemed to recover herself with great rapidity. She straightened the stalks of a drooping goldenrod displaced by Mac's paws, and brushing the soil from her skirts she stood up. "I have made the beginning of an untamed garden, and he disturbed my new planting," she said with a flush that Betsy took for shame. "I am not to have my flowers deranged, without action."

Betsy looked at the drooping goldenrod and the wispy Michealmas daisies that stood in a small forlorn row in the fresh earth. "I didn't know you were so fond of flowers," she said, recalling the faded white asters of Monday morning.

Amiee flashed a look at her. "I adore these plantings," she returned with emphasis. "I want that no one, *no one* should disturb them."

Betsy raised her eyebrows. "I guess

nobody will want to steal them," she said, and then she felt that she had been too sarcastic, until she saw the pleased gleam in Amiee's eye. That determined her afresh. "She *must* be crazy to act like she does," she thought. "I'll have to keep on the watch, and make up my mind what to do."

Her task was a very easy one, for Amiee behaved in her usual quiet manner. She seemed a shade more sociable than before, but there was no other change in her. Breakfast and lesson passed in their customary fashion. Amiee went through her morning duties with calm decorum. Betsy thought she caught that gleam of light in her eyes more than once, but there was no other sign. At twelve o'clock Betsy's vigilance relaxed. She had decided on her course of action.

She left Amiee studying in her room, and she slipped out by the back way. Her path led her up the winding road and across the hilly short cut to Dr. Stanton's house. She found Emma Clara at home among her pretty new belongings. She stayed nearly half an hour and when she left Emma Clara came to the door with her.

"Bring her over about half-past three," she said. "Then we'll have time to go over to the hospital before four and we can be back here for tea in good time. I'll see that the Doctor looks her over pretty thoroughly. You want to be very sure."

Betsy was late for lunch. She was relieved to see that Amiee showed no signs of agitation or unrest, and that Mrs. Hale was serenely unconscious of everything save her own thoughts. "She's not broken out again while I was away, and that's a mercy," said Betsy thankfully. "I hope she'll be reasonable about going over to Emma Clara's for tea."

Amiee was very reasonable. She showed none of her late reluctance to leave her room. She even said she should like to go. When she learned that Selma was to be of the party she made no protest.

When Betsy went to freshen up for the visit, she was surprised to see Lucy in the room opposite, cleaning away vigorously at the long delayed window, while Amiee pinned on her everyday hat at the mirror over the dresser. When Amiee walked downstairs after her, leaving the door unlocked, Betsy reminded her of the omission.

Amiee only shook her head. "I am not fearful now," she said with a sort of triumph in her tone. "I allow the key to make a rest of itself."

Betsy glanced keenly at her. "She's surely mad," she thought. "She's changing a lot all the time."

Under this impression she was glad when Selma joined them on their way and hastened the pace. "I have to be back early," she explained. "I've such a pack of problems for tomorrow that I'll have to sit up all night unless I'm at them before supper."

Emma Clara welcomed them with pleasant hospitality. She made Amiee feel at home at once, it seemed, for when she proposed a visit to the hospital in which they had all been so much interested, Amiee was one of the first to rise.

"I have heard of your American hospitals, and it would make pleasure to me to see one," she said earnestly. "Is it that one can see it entire?"

Emma Clara assured her that she should see everything there was to be seen. Dr. Stanton would be in the dispensary until

nearly four, and they could even see that, she told her.

Betsy felt rather mean when she saw how eager Amiee was to reach the hospital. "She doesn't dream we're taking her there on purpose," she managed to whisper to Emma Clara as they went up the gravel path to the cheerful little hospital.

She felt meaner still when Amiee, after surveying operating room and X-ray department, became interested and began to ask questions, almost like any other girl. In the kitchen her attention was diverted. Mrs. Delaney, after welcoming them and explaining her utensils to the newcomer, drew Betsy aside to tell her proudly that Jimmy was "doin' gran'. Money every week reg'lar as the sun. That pore craytur had a *re*-lapse and Jimmy's got his job for good, and he's a reel elyphant driver now for sure. He's a-comin' home next Toosday for a bit of a visit. He's tendin' the camiels, too," she ended triumphantly.

In Miss Willie's room, too, there was some news. Miss Willie, while the others were admiring the view from the south window,

whispered to Betsy that she was thinking of celebrating her returning health by a party—actually a party. "I shall not have a soul who was not my friend in former times," she said very positively. Miss Willie's popularity had grown greatly since her gift of the hospital house. "The good Philip will be through those delayed examinations soon, and I shall then announce it. Until then we will not speak of it," and she laid her finger on her lips as Selma turned with a question about her last library book.

Betsy's eyes were dancing as they went down the sunny white corridor, but they sobered at the sight of a young woman with a baby in her arms coming out of a door on the right. The word *Dispensary* was painted over it in clear black letters and Dr. Stanton was seated at the desk just inside the door. "He's ready for Amiee," thought Betsy in sudden panic. "Oh, dear, I feel like a perfect cheat, doing it on the sly like this."

Emma Clara was ushering them into the clean, business-like room, with its shelves and jars and bottles. She had introduced Amiee to the Doctor before Betsy had recovered

herself, and was explaining playfully the charts and electric system, when the Doctor interrupted her.

"You'd best let me show Miss Amiee how they work," he said with his nice smile. "You take the others off—they're old hands at this place—and I'll explain properly. It's a small room, Miss Amiee, but it has a good many points of interest," and he swung open the nearest cabinet, while Amiee stepped close to inspect its contents. She seemed deeply absorbed.

"I feel like a thief," whispered Betsy to Emma Clara as they went out through the consulting room. "She doesn't suspect a thing!"

Nothing more could be said, since Selma was not in the secret, and they spent the next half hour visiting in the small free ward, where they were welcomed eagerly, and Betsy's particular friend of the moment, a small bent old woman in a night-cap kept her well occupied with stories of her early days in the old country, until the Doctor appeared with Amiee.

He drew Emma Clara into an alcove for a

few words, and then, with a pleasant good-bye and hearty handshake he left them.

After they were back in Emma Clara's cozy living-room Betsy had an opportunity to hear Doctor's Stanton's verdict. Emma Clara sent Selma to show Amiee the fern book in the library—Mrs. Stanton was really very proud of her collection—and then she gave Betsy the message.

"He said to tell you she was absolutely normal," she repeated. "She may be confused by the strange customs here, but her mind is as clear as a bell. You needn't be afraid of anything she does, for it rises merely from the difference in our customs and her own."

Betsy was relieved and yet her perplexity increased. It might have been easier to explain Amiee's actions had she really been insane. "She's rather queer, though," she murmured thoughtfully. She was thinking of the moonlight digging.

Emma Clara smiled comfortably. It is easy to solve other people's perplexities. "She isn't used to our ways yet," she told Betsy, as she lighted the samovar. "She'll

be quite one of us in a month or so, you may be sure," she added after the blaze was going. "But she is rather quiet, isn't she?"

Selma and Amiee appeared and there was no more chance for confidential talk. It seemed that the ferns had not proved very attractive to the French girl. She was very quiet during the tea hour, too, and she hardly spoke a word on the homeward trip.

Selma and Betsy made up for her, however, and Jimmy Delaney's visit was discussed with interest. "I do hope Philip will be home then," said Betsy, as they stopped at the branching pathways of the short cut to part from Selma. "He'd like to hear about Mr. MacTavish and all the rest of the circus. He knew them pretty well, you know."

Selma nodded. Her mind was on Jimmy Delaney. She had not give up her old opinion as to his abilities.

"He may drive elephants and he may learn to ride camels," she said, "but he'll never, never learn to be a wild animal tamer. You have to study them in their lairs and trap them, too, before you can learn to tame them."

Betsy did not argue the point. She knew Selma too well. She merely laughed and said, "It will be fun to see Jimmy again, anyway. "He'll have lots to tell, for he's been traveling ever since he left here."

After they had said good-bye and were on the winding road coming down past the thicket, Amiee broke her long silence. "Who is Jimmee Delanee?" she asked.

Betsy gave her a short history of the versatile Jimmy, on which Amiee made no comment. They walked on briskly and were soon at the gate of the Wee Corner. The sun was glinting on the western windows and a few yellow leaves were drifting down from the sycamore back of the barn.

Betsy felt a lifting of the heart as she laid her hand on the flag-path gate.

"I'm awfully glad that Amiee isn't really insane," she thought thankfully. "It's a great load off of my mind."

Her brow puckered, however, when she saw Amiee make her usual trip to the side of the house before going indoors.

"Perhaps it is French to be so daffy over a dried-up, frost-bitten bit of garden bed," she

said to herself as she followed Amiee into the house. "It's very, very queer, though. I wonder what she'll do next?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### Jimmy's Joyful Entry

"I GUESS the Doctor was right. She hasn't done anything very queer since that night," said Betsy.

She was in the cheerful reception room at the hospital, talking to Emma Clara. She had run over to ask Mrs. Delaney the exact hour when Jimmy was to be expected and had met Mrs. Stanton on her way out.

Emma Clara smiled. "People often do odd things when they're out of sorts," she said easily, and she dropped the subject. "I suppose you're going to be on hand for Jimmy today? He certainly means to see everyone he knows in town. Mrs. Delaney tells me he sent word that he was coming in by the Lime-kiln Road, and for people to be on the look-out for him."

"He's just the same old Jimmy as ever," laughed Betsy. "Do you remember how he rode the trick donkey in our parade last

spring? He does love to show off, doesn't he? I'm going to ask Mother if we mayn't go out to meet him. Selma has the buggy and——"

Here the old woman with the frilled night-cap shuffled into sight, and Betsy, fearful of being detained, slipped out of the other door and away towards the Wee Corner. "I'll ask Mother and then run over and tell Selma," she said as she skipped along. "Amiee may not want to go very much, but she'll just have to. I'm not going to miss Jimmy if I can help it. He's such fun."

It was a week after her visit to the dispensary with Amiee and, as she had told Emma Clara, nothing very particular had happened. Amiee kept her habit of visiting her wilting garden bed every time she came out or went in, and she had developed a passion for newspaper reading. Otherwise she was settling down to the routine of everyday life at the Wee Corner with something like placidity. She tolerated Selma with a better grace than at first. She welcomed Philip's rare visits with more warmth than she displayed to anyone else. She even showed less disdain

for Lucy than Betsy expected. Her room, too, was always unlocked now and the key lay neglected on the dresser.

"She isn't exactly friendly yet," Betsy had told her mother hopefully that very morning, "but she isn't so sort of hard-shelled as she was when she first came."

As she hurried along she repeated her words. "She'll just have to go," and she was prepared to have to use great persuasion with Amiee when she told her of the projected drive to meet Jimmy.

To her surprise Amiee showed no reluctance. "I shall be ingratiate to see the traveler," she said calmly, and she went for her things at once. Betsy had to call her back to tell her that they were not to start till after lunch, if they were to be allowed to go at all. When Betsy made her request Amiee seconded it with a faint, "If you please, Madame."

Of course they were allowed to go. Mrs. Hale declared she should like to be one of the party herself if it were not that she had to spend the afternoon in town with the Emergency Aid, where she had promised to give a

talk. Selma arrived promptly after lunch and they started off in good season.

"We'll go out as far as the Five Points," said Selma, clucking to old Dolly. "We can see ever so far down the Limekiln Road from that hump where the other roads come in. Oh, get up, Dolly, do! You're such a poke!"

Betsy sat forward on the seat, tingling with eagerness. Amiee settled herself sedately back against the padded back, while Selma, erect and intent, twitched the reins impatiently. "Go on, Dolly," she cried. "We'll never get there if you don't wake up."

They turned the corner into the main street before Betsy moved or spoke. Then she started into action. "That horrid sneaking Spot!" she cried energetically, catching out the whip. "Do make Dolly go faster, Selma, so I can get a whack at him."

Selma tugged at the reins, but Dolly refused to obey. Instead she stopped quite still and shook her head reproachfully at the ugly dog who had rushed out from the sidewalk and was jumping and snapping at her. Betsy's whip thrashed about fiercely, and at last she managed to touch the bouncing, growling

creature with the tip of the lash, and Spot retreated, tail between his legs, to the shelter of the nearest tree, where he stood, with his hair on end and his long white teeth showing in a menacing line.

"He's a perfect nuisance," declared Betsy as Dolly moved off. "I don't see why he's allowed to bother people so. He goes for every team that goes through the village. I wish some automobile would scare him to death some day."

"He is a mighty mean creature," agreed Selma. "Most every town has a dog like that, though. What are you going to do about it, when Mrs. Tubbs won't try to make him stop? She says he's a good watch-dog and she don't want his spirit broke."

Betsy sniffed. "He's a coward, and he runs a mile to keep away from Mac every time," she replied. "He wouldn't have spunk enough to bark at a burglar, and I know it. He only bites the littlest children, and he snaps them up at their heels."

Selma took things more calmly than Betsy. She slapped the reins on Dolly's broad back. "Oh, well, he'll get his dose some day, I

guess," she remarked placidly. "Those dogs always get run over, or something. Aren't those swamp maples pretty? The top branches are as red as red can be."

The beauties of the autumn foliage all along the way kept them intent on the waysides, and they came to the Five Points before they knew it. Betsy strained her eyes eagerly and Selma stood up in the buggy. The road lay empty in the mellow sunshine, a white ribbon between the vivid colors of its hedges.

"He's very late," remarked Betsy, and a pucker came between her brows.

"Perhaps he isn't coming," suggested Selma, who sometimes looked on the darker side.

"Jimmy isn't that sort—" began Betsy, when they both gave a squeak of surprise.

A figure was coming over the last misty incline.

"There he is!" cried Selma.

"He's riding a horse," added Betsy. "Oh, I do hope it's a trained horse that can do tricks!"

Amiee said nothing. She kept her eyes on the approaching figure. "It is not a horse

that your Jimmee rides upon," she interposed gravely. "It is of a color un-horselike. See."

They had to confess it was not a horse when the figure grew more distinct. Selma sat down suddenly as Dolly pricked up her ears and moved uneasily. Betsy caught her breath as she cried out her discovery.

"It's a *camel!*" she told them. "A real live cam——"

She got no further in her news. Dolly discovered at that same instant what sort of a beast was loping so swiftly towards her on the smooth white Limekiln Road. There was a snort, a leap and then the buggy tore off up the branching Greenville Road.

"She's running away," gasped Selma, perfectly paralyzed by the stupendous fact. "Dolly's running away!"

Betsy put a firm hand on Amiee's shoulder to keep her to her seat. "Don't dare to jump," she commanded. "Sit still. Selma won't let you get hurt."

She was not at all sure of the truth of her words as she uttered them, but they had their effect. Amiee sank back with her eyes glued

on Selma and the flying Dolly. "It is of a suddenness," she whispered through her white lips.

"Whoa! Whoa! *Whoa!*" cried Selma, taking command in an instant. "Dolly, do you hear me? Stop, this instant!"

It may have been that Dolly heard more clearly than usual, or it may have been that she found her joints too stiff for such activity. Whatever the reason, she soon slowed to a trot and then to a slower and slower amble until she stood quite still beneath a tree at the beginning of Ladd's Woods, about a quarter of a mile from the Five Points cross-roads.

Selma got out and felt her bridle, looked at her other harness to see that nothing was injured, and then patted Dolly's nose with a sudden flush of pride.

"I didn't think you had it in you, old lady," she said approvingly. "You can go when you've a mind, can't you? Why, what's the matter now?" she added hastily as she grabbed the bridle with firm hands. "What are you up to now?"

Dolly was shivering and trembling

strangely. There was a padding sound in the soft, dusty road behind. Selma saw the big tawny bulk of Jimmy's strange steed heaving swiftly towards them.

"Hold up, Jimmy. Don't come any nearer," she called. "Dolly's scared to fits, can't you see? Oh, the stupid," she ended sharply, and she gripped the bridle tighter than ever.

Betsy peered out around the side curtain just in time to see the big camel with its queer saddle and Jimmy Delaney on top of it, heave past at a rapid rate. She saw Dolly shiver, and then pick up her ears as Jimmy turned the camel and brought it to a halt.

"Dolly will simply *die*," she whispered and took a fresh hold on Amiee's shoulder.

Dolly, however, did no such thing. She cocked her little ears forward as the camel came to a standstill. She sniffed gingerly at the tainted air. She shook her head as hard as she could for Selma's clutch on her mouth, and then she became resigned. She looked earnestly at the ungainly brute on the other side of the road, but she did not offer to run away again. Even when Selma relaxed her

hold on the bridle, she merely stared at the camel and stood perfectly still.

"She's all right now," called Jimmy from his perch on the tall hump. "Wait till I get off. We'll make them acquainted."

He was not in the least disturbed about causing the runaway. He was just as cheerful about it as though it were the regular part of an afternoon drive. "Here, I'll show you," he said, nodding pleasantly to Selma, who frowned slightly and muttered something about "animal trainers" and "lairs," and put her hand again on Dolly's bridle.

Jimmy made a harsh, purring sound and slowly his steed began to fold up his many joints. First his big knees and then his hind legs and then the front ones again, and so on until he was huddled on the dusty road, without a sign of legs about him. Then Jimmy stepped off and surveyed him proudly.

"Ain't he a peach?" he declaimed. "Why, there ain't another dromedary like him this side of—here, you, don't try that on me!" he ended angrily, as the camel, with a swift motion, made a snap at him. "He's sort of grouchy because he's been on the move for

three days runnin'," he explained, stepping a bit further from his pet's reach. "We've been movin' pretty fast, and he's been paradin' extra duty around the streets, besides showin' off in the after-show at nights. He's sort of on edge, you see, bein' sort of wore out for sleep."

The camel proved his words by drooping his eyelids in a particularly scornful fashion. He looked as though the sight of Dolly and the buggy and the girls made him very sick. His under lip sagged disgustedly, and he gave a contemptuous grunt as he closed his vicious little eyes to shut out the whole scene.

Jimmy looked at him with undiminished pride. "He's a regular express train," he boasted. "He can make over fifty miles a day. What do you think of that? And he never gets regularly tired. He gets sort of edgey and snaps about a bit, but he never gets tired, like horses and things. That's why I came on him. Make good time and advertise the show, too."

He showed them the lettering that their agitation had overlooked. "Top Notch Circus" in black characters on the red saddle

cloth. "Makes 'em stare when they see that," he told them. "All the towns I come through just sat up and took notice. Sahib took the shine off of everything we passed."

Betsy stared at the great supercilious brute with eager interest. "He's perfectly wonderful," she admitted. "Such a splendid saddle, too. How did they let you have him, Jimmy? I should think they'd be afraid to let him go so far away with just you."

Jimmy grinned. "I'm his keeper," he told her with a triumphant cock of his head. "I take care of old Bolivar and this here dromedary. I'm a regular hand at the business, and I'm to start in next month helpin' Blinkins train the new elephant we got last week. I'm comin' on, you see."

Selma pursed her mouth. She did not approve such complacency. She turned to Amiee, who was staring at Jimmy with real interest. "Well, we'd best be going back," she said quietly. "The people will be waiting, and they may go home if you don't come."

Jimmy's freckled face lighted up with a beaming smile. "Did they get my word? Are they waitin'—honest?" he questioned

eagerly. At Selma's nod, he laughed aloud. "Gee, that's white of 'em!" he exclaimed. "I didn't think they'd take the trouble. Here, let's get in line. We'll be movin', I guess."

Dolly was cropping the leaves from an overhanging branch, and there was no need for further concern as to her. Selma turned to get into the buggy again and Jimmy stepped toward his crouching camel. "I'll give you a good start," he offered. "Dolly ain't often so fast as she was a bit ago."

Suddenly Amiee leaned forward. "Pardon," she said in a curious voice. Betsy thought she was frightened until she heard the next words. "Pardon, M'sieu Jimmee, is it that one could ride upon that camel-beast for a so little space of time? I shall love very much to make the effort."

The two girls were petrified. Jimmy himself appeared astonished. He grinned, however, with his usual good nature. "Sure," he responded easily. "I'll give you a turn if you're so stuck on it."

Betsy saw with increasing surprise that Amiee's face was quite white as she stepped down from the buggy to the camel's side.

"She looks awfully frightened," she thought, "but she really isn't, I suppose, or she wouldn't do it."

A memory of that moonlight digging crossed her mind as she watched Amiee cross the road to the scornful tawny beast crouching in the flicker of shadow and sunshine. "She's having another attack," she said to herself. "Dr. Stanton ought to see her now."

Jimmy showed the white-faced Amiee how to step on the camel's neck with her left foot and right hand on the rear pommel of the saddle. When she was safely up and Jimmy had mounted in front of her, he gave the command, "Hang on tight, for he's sort of rough at first."

Then he loosened the rope and prodded the camel on the shoulder with his foot. The camel grunted scornfully and rose. Jimmy waved his cap as the big brute started evenly off towards the town.

"We'll wait for you at Chipley's bridge," he shouted. "She won't want to go any further than that, I guess."

They watched the strange little group as the camel fell into his heaving onward surge.

Amiee's white face looked back at them for a moment and then vanished in the dust-cloud that followed.

Betsy looked at Selma as she backed the docile Dolly for the turn toward the village.

"Well!" she said emphatically. "What will she do next?"

Selma was interested in the camel. She reached for the whip.

"Dolly isn't afraid of him any more, thank goodness," she returned with animation. "I want to see the fun. Get up, Dolly, do!"

Betsy gave a gasp. "Oh, there isn't any danger?" she questioned in dismay.

Selma giggled. "No, there isn't any danger, with Jimmy right there, but it will be awfully funny," she told the relieved Betsy. "I've seen girls ride camels at the Moorish Street in the side-show at the Sconset Fair. Get up, Dolly!"

## CHAPTER IX

### Amiee Takes a Ride

"WE'VE missed the fun, after all," said Selma in gentle surprise.

They could see Jimmy and Amiee standing in the shadow of the trees by the bridge while the camel rested on the turf by the wayside. He was doubled up in his legless state, and his sneer was visible even from that distance.

Betsy was genuinely glad to see, as they drew nearer, that Amiee was neither pale nor frightened. Her dark face was alive with interest, and she was talking earnestly with Jimmy, who appeared rather ill at ease. He welcomed them with relief.

"I'll meet you at the cross-roads. I'm going to loop around by the back way and drop in on the hospital. Mother's on her job, and I've got to see her," he told them, as he helped Amiee into the buggy with a rather bad grace. He whispered to Betsy hastily:

"She's put me through the ropes, I tell you. Asked the names of all the towns I ever saw, and the folks in 'em, too." And then with a wink to her and a wave to the others, he mounted the Sahib again and gave the signal.

Dolly merely cocked her ears and watched placidly while the big camel, grunting viciously, rose and got under way. Selma looked at her approvingly. "She isn't a bit afraid of him now," she remarked as she shook the reins. "She's got such a lot of sense, even if she is a poke."

Betsy, now that her mind was free from fear for Amiee, looked ahead with great expectancy. "We'll have a hard time getting a good place if we don't hurry," she said suggestively.

Selma took out the whip again. "We'll get there before he does," she replied firmly, and Dolly, hearing the familiar sound, started off at a good round pace.

Clip-clop, clip-clop. On they went, past the bridge, past the woods, past the newly plowed fields of the Harris farm. They crept up the hill by the Methodist church and trotted down the incline past the Rectory.

"What a lot of people," cried Betsy gleefully, as they came to the cross-roads and drew up in front of the store. "Everybody's out to meet Jimmy. Oh, won't they be surprised!"

Sure enough, everybody was there. Some of them were smiling and some of them were pretending to disapprove, but there they were, all of them. Mrs. Giles' Sunday bonnet was next to old Mr. Thomson's battered derby. Mr. Higbee was peering out of the side window of the store, while Mrs. Worthington was coming down the path in front of the large white house. Small boys on their way from school dangled their books by straps, tantalizing stray dogs, to the annoyance of the little girls who waited primly for the event.

"There's a line two deep along the curb, all the way up to the turn," said Selma with relish. "My, won't they enjoy that camel, though!"

Spot was skulking through the scene, sniffing at the ankles that were temptingly displayed, but making no attacks, perhaps because of the men and boys here and there

in the line. He shambled around the heels of the two or three horses tied at the store rail, and then trotted off out of sight among the tall bushes of the ruined wagon shop on the opposite corner.

The sound of wheels turned the attention of all to a dilapidated buggy rounding the corner by the store. A gaunt horse with a fiery eye was between the shafts and a red-nosed man sat on the tattered seat. It was Ned Watson, the ne'er-do-well farmer from the Corners, and he waved a genial hand to the assembly, steering his horse with practiced ease among the cluster of wagons and people at the cross-roads.

"Goin' to the tavern at this time o' day," muttered a man near Betsy's side of the road. "He'd ought to be workin' for them kids o' hisn, 'stid o' loafin' about like that."

A murmur ran through those nearest who heard the words, and the slight sound attracted the attention of the others. All eyes were fastened on Ned Watson and his shabby vehicle as they made their way up the road. Acquaintances among the crowd called hilarious greetings to the unabashed Ned,

asking very pointedly where he was goin' at. Ned grinned, slowed the fiery-eyed horse to a walk.

"I'll tell ye where I a-goin' at," he shouted joyfully in reply. "I'm a-goin'——"

He broke off at a wild snort from the horse, who jumped and landed, four feet spread widely, and then stood staring with bulging eyes at the other end of the street.

The big camel was swinging around the turn, with his under lip wagging impatiently and Jimmy sitting majestically on his back!

"Gosh a'mighty!" screamed Ned, reaching out for a good grip on the lines. "I'm a-goin' *home!*" and with a skilful hand, he turned the shakling buggy with a whirl. The fiery-eyed horse obeyed the practiced touch on his bit, but when he was turned he gave another snort and leaped away, with Ned urging at his back and the buggy clattering over the roadway at his frightened heels.

A shout of laughter rang along the curb, and a voice called out, "He's got goin' straight at last!"

Betsy had not time to rejoice over Mr. Watson's longing for his home. The camel

was bearing down the street, and the cheers and laughter rose as he came. Two of the tied horses bolted as he came, tearing away in the opposite direction without regard to their owners on the curb. Dogs barked, boys shouted. It was a moment of tumultuous excitement.

"Hurrah for Jimmy Delaney!" screamed the school boys.

"Three cheers for Jimmy and the Circus," squeaked the girls from the grammar grades.

"Look at the camel!" cried Bill the hostler. "Ain't he got a sickenin' smile?"

"Where'd you git him?" queried a chorus. "Show us his tricks, Jimmy."

Jimmy waved them back with his lordly air. "I'll stop him and show you how he minds the signals," he told them loftily. "He ain't no trick monkey. He's a high-class dromedary from Arabia. You'll have to keep back, though. He's got teeth."

The boys surged backward at this threatening speech, and Jimmy brought his big dromedary to a halt in the midst of a wide space in front of the Worthington house. The camel sneered exceedingly as the harsh purring

sound was given, but he obeyed the signal to kneel and his many joints doubled themselves together in the usual way until he came to earth, a legless mound of rough, hairy hide, surmounted by a gaudy saddle with Jimmy on it, and topped off with his own bored, sarcastic head.

"Gosh! He's not a beauty, is he?" commented Mr. Higbee, coming out of the side door and edging closer. "Ain't you afraid to take him about loose like this?" he asked.

The proud Jimmy shook his head. "He's all right when you know how to take him," he replied. "I'll show you how easy he is to steer."

And then he made the camel rise, and take a few steps, and kneel again. "He's all right, you see," he told them, and, inflated by their admiring eyes, made the camel kneel again and rise at the word of command.

The Sahib's little eyes were spots of red light, but he obeyed, grunting fearfully, and he stepped slowly out as Jimmy pressed his shoulder with the compelling toe. He was obedient, but he was angry, too. Angry camels keep their thoughts to themselves.

Jimmy brought him to a halt for the third time. "See how he minds," he bragged. "He's a thoroughbred from Arabia. He ain't any of them freighters with two humps. He's——"

Just then Spot appeared. He had seen the Sahib meekly obeying Jimmy's orders, and he felt it was time to leave the shelter of the ruined stairway. He made straight for the sagging lip of the Sahib, and he barked his fiercest bark, dancing up and down in front of him in his usual bullying fashion.

"Yay-yah-*yah!*" snapped Spot, and made a lunge for the motionless Sahib's tempting under-lip.

The Sahib's sneer never changed a muscle. Spot might have been a mile away for all he noticed. But his eyes twinkled.

"He's a high-class Egyptian," finished Jimmy, giving the purring signal in sheer light-headedness.

The Sahib grunted fearfully, but he collapsed into the dust obediently. Spot edged closer. He had no respect for this foolish creature with the queer hump on his back. He sniffed the saddle cloth. Then he raised

his inquisitive nose to the sneering face and he growled a little to show what he thought of the camel.

Instantly there was a scream. The Sahib's head shot out. Spot rose in the air, gripped through the back by the iron teeth in the sneering mouth. When the Sahib flung the limp body from him, Spot rolled limply into the ditch and lay quite still.

"He's finished him, and serve him right," said Selma with a nod. "I said he'd get his dues some day."

Betsy was trembling at the sight of the broken body in the ditch. "He was horrid," she agreed, "but that camel is perfectly abominable, I think."

Amiee said nothing. She looked at the camel and Jimmy with absent eyes. She hardly seemed to see the lively scene before her. After someone had thrown a cloth over Spot's body, and Jimmy was bringing the Sahib to his feet for the last time, she pulled Betsy by the sleeve.

"Is it far to Alandale?" she asked, with her somber eyes alight.

Betsy thought that she meant Jimmy was

going to Alandale, and replied readily that it was fifteen miles, but that was nothing for a camel. "He'll make it in no time," she assured her.

Amiee made no response and Betsy soon forgot her question in the tumult of farewells that rose as Jimmy turned the big camel and started off up the road he had come. It was not the road to Alandale. In fact, it led in quite the opposite direction.

The event was over and the line along the curb dispersed. Mrs. Tubbs, lamenting loudly, had taken Spot's body away to her back garden. The runaway horses were captured and returned undamaged, and the school children went home to lessons and supper.

Selma drove the two girls back to the Wee Corner and then turned Dolly towards the village again. "She's an awful poke, but she's pretty sensible, too," she leaned out of the buggy to say. "There wasn't another horse who'd have behaved like she did."

Betsy watched her drive away and then she followed Amiee into the house. She noticed that the customary visit to the gar-

den bed was omitted, and she caught the whispered word that Amiee was repeating to herself as she hurried along.

"Alandale!" thought Betsy in surprise. "Why in the world is she saying that over and over again? Is she trying to remember all the geography of this country, or is she going crazy again?"

The next day brought the answer to her question. It was not at all the one she would have expected.

## CHAPTER X

### The Road to Alandale

BETSY dressed the next morning in very leisurely fashion.

She was thinking of Helen's note which had come the day before. Helen wrote from Washington, where Betsy's letter had followed them. She told Betsy that Major Gordon was in Newport News, "doing something in the aviation service" for a few days, after which he would go to New York for a while. If Betsy had any inquiries to make she had best write to him at the New York address carefully written at the bottom of the sheet.

"I'll write tomorrow, and I'll ask him not to tell a soul," thought Betsy as she pulled on her left stocking. She felt rather important to be planning such official dispatches. "I'll ask him if he hears of any French immigrants named LaLanne to let me know. And I'll enclose a stamped envelope to show that I don't want to bother him any more than I can help."

She pulled on her other stocking and buttoned her shoes seriously. Her whole mind was on the letter. She wanted to make it very clear and quite short. She halted on the fourth button of the second shoe. "Why," she said, "I don't know either of their names. Amiee never told me either her father's or her mother's first name. I'll have to ask her."

She was dressed in a jiffy after that, and was tapping lightly on Amiee's door, which was standing just the tiniest bit ajar. Betsy could see the glint of the window as she tapped. She knocked twice, and then she pushed the door open. The bed was neatly made and Amiee's school books were in a neat pile on the chair by the door.

"She's gotten ahead of me for once," thought Betsy with a little laugh. "She must have been up pretty early to have aired and made her bed so soon. I'll find her outside, I suppose."

She ran down to seek Amiee in the frosty garden, but though she flew to the side of the house and looked after that in the summer house and in the back garden, no sign of Amiee was to be found.

"Where's Amiee?" she asked of Lucy, who was stirring hot-cakes by the kitchen table. She had searched the lower rooms in vain.

Lucy shook her head. "Haven't seen her yet," she replied. "She ain't apt to snoop about this early, not to my knowledge. What did you take that roll for? I was a-savin' it for your Ma's breakfast, special. I don't mind the bit of meat, nor the tomat, but I did want that roll."

Betsy faced her with surprised eyes. "I didn't take any roll, and I don't know what you're talking about," she protested. "What do you mean?"

Lucy saw the truth written on her astonished face. "Well, mebbe it ain't you," she returned slowly as she dropped the baking powder into the batter. "It's that Mac, mebbe. Though he ain't in the habit of touchin' things that way."

Betsy went all through the house again without finding Amiee. Mrs. Hale came into the dining-room just as Betsy was leaving it. "I'm going up to see if she's come in without my hearing her," she explained as she hurried past.

She was back in a minute with a startled face. She held a note in her hand. "It's to you, Mother," she said in an awed tone. "I found it on her dresser. I didn't notice it before. Oh, I do hope she hasn't drowned herself or—or anything!"

Mrs. Hale smiled reassuringly, though her face, too, was rather white as she took the note from Betsy's shaking fingers. She opened it quickly and her smile grew warmer.

"It is only a line to say that she had gone for an early walk," she said with evident relief. She laid the note on the cloth by Betsy's place.

Betsy read it as she dropped into her chair. "Dear Madame," it ran, "I make my excuses for the early absence. I go to walk in the distance, and to return soon should my paths not be lost. Pardon the absence from table and the breakfast taken secretly—" Here Betsy looked up at Lucy, who was bringing in the hot cakes.

"It was Amiee who took the roll and stuff," she told her triumphantly. "I didn't think old Mac could have done it. She's gone for a long walk and she won't be here for breakfast."

Lucy showed unexpected concern. "She hadn't ought to have done that," she said gravely. "She ain't well acquainted with these parts, and they're confusin' to a stranger. I used to get mixed up myself, and I wasn't town-bred like she is, either."

"Oh, she's all right," Betsy told her confidently. "Amiee's dreadfully cautious. She'll hardly venture far. She's afraid of bushes and things like that. I believe she'll be back before we've finished breakfast."

But Amiee did not come. Breakfast ended and the bed-making period passed. Lesson hour arrived without Amiee. Lunch found her chair still vacant. It was almost three o'clock before Mrs. Hale began to be really anxious. Then she called Betsy, who was concocting her letter to Major Gordon in the solitude by her own dormer window.

"Run over to Worthington's, Betsy-girl," she said, when the abstracted composer appeared. "Perhaps Amiee is with Selma and has neglected to let us know. It's strange, though, that she should be so forgetful. She is usually so reliable.

Betsy, coming out of her haze of composi-

tion, took alarm at her mother's evident concern. Her quick mind flashed to instant action. "Shan't I look about the place again?" she asked as she poised on the step, pulling on her sweater with eager fingers. "She might be somewhere around. I used to go sit in the barn myself, you know, when——"

"Lucy and I have been all over the place," her mother told her. "She must be at Selma's, or perhaps—is there any other place she might go?"

Betsy thought. "She goes to the hospital a lot," she admitted. "Miss Willie told me that today when I was in to see her for a minute on the way from the mail. I didn't know she went there. I thought she was out walking, in the afternoons," she explained, as an afterthought.

Mrs. Hale made a gesture of surprise. "I thought you were quite in Amiee's confidence by this time," she said with a puzzled pucker of her forehead. "I'm sure you usually make friends easily—when you like them."

Betsy's conscience gave a little twist. "I like Amiee pretty well," she returned truth-

fully. "I'd like her a lot better if she'd like me. But I don't know her, really. I don't know what she thinks or likes, either. She's quiet, and I've been afraid to say much, for fear she'd think I was heartless. French orphans are rather different from other people, I think."

Mrs. Hale could not help laughing down at the perplexed face. She stooped to drop a kiss on the anxious lips, and then she gave Betsy a little push.

"Run along and bring your orphan home as soon as you can," she admonished. "We'll settle about the matter of racial differences when Amiee is safe and sound again."

Betsy buttoned her sweater as she hurried off. Mac dashed out from the back garden as she passed, and although his nose was crusted with fresh earth, she did not pause to even pretend to lecture him about the parsley bed. He cantered at her heels as she sped over the long incline, up past the beech copse, past Mr. Simpson's neat house, where Mrs. Sloan, the housekeeper, was hanging out a winter overcoat and horse blanket, past the Hall, around the corner and into the leaf-

strewn drive by Worthington's large white house.

"Selma is away in Highville, my dear. She had to have a tooth attended to," Mrs. Worthington told her in mild surprise at the visit. "She went over last evening directly after school. I wonder you did not hear of it. The tooth was very painful indeed, and she had to go right off."

Betsy was on pins and needles to be gone, but she waited politely until Mrs. Worthington had described Selma's sensations and her father's prompt action. "So he took her right off last evening, and she's staying with her Auntie till it's all over," she ended. "How is that little French Amiee of yours? I haven't seen her to speak to yet. Bring her over when you come again."

Betsy was away at last. She felt very diplomatic that she had not revealed her real errand to Mrs. Worthington. She decided it would be best not to tell of Amiee's absence if she could help it.

She found Miss Willie in the sun-parlor at the top of the house. She spent only a minute with her, since her greeting told everything Betsy wanted to know.

"How do you do this fine afternoon, little Miss Betsy?" she asked in her agreeable voice. "Have you brought Miss Amiee with you? She promised to bring me a picture of the Louvre when she came again and I am awaiting her with pleasure."

Betsy murmured an excuse for both Amiee and herself. She had only a moment to stay, she told Miss Willie breathlessly, and with a flurried good-bye she left her and hastened to find Emma Clara.

Mrs. Stanton was sitting at her front door as Betsy came up. She turned her pleasant face with a warm welcome shining on it. "Come and take a ride," she invited, pointing to the gray car at the curb. "I'm going over to Highville on an errand and I'm running the car all by myself today. I'll be back by four."

Betsy shook her head. She looked longingly at Emma Clara and the car. "I'd love to, but I can't," she replied earnestly. "I really can't." Then a happy thought struck her. "If you see Aimee on the way will you take her up with you? She'll be pretty tired, I think. She's gone for a walk and she isn't used to it, you know."

Emma Clara, intent on the electric starter, nodded amiably. "I'll look out for her," she said. "Sorry you can't go, though. It's a lovely day for a ride."

Betsy walked soberly homeward with Mac bounding gaily beside her. She was beginning to be very much alarmed, as pictures of Amiee in all sorts of distressing situations rose before her. "She might be fainting by the wayside," she thought with dismay. "Or she may have fallen into a gravel pit, like the twins in 'Two Sisters.' Or she could have easily mistaken the way and gotten into that horrid Hungarian settlement beyond the mills at Norton. She's been away long enough for anything to happen. I wish Phil were home. He'd find her in no time."

She found her mother waiting impatiently. The color was gone from her cheeks and her blue eyes were dark and troubled. She walked restlessly up and down the flag path as she listened to Betsy's report.

"We'll have to make one more effort before we notify anyone," she said quickly. "I shall send Lucy over the high road towards Norton, while I take the Limekiln road. Since

Emma Clara is on the Highville road, it won't be necessary to look there. We'll start at once."

Lucy was at her elbow before she could call her, and it was quickly arranged that they should make such inquiries at the houses by the way as appeared proper. "We needn't ask right out, I s'pose," said Lucy, pinning on her hat with vigorous jabs. "We ain't wantin' to make out she's run away."

Betsy gave a gasp. That idea had not entered her head. She thought a moment and then spoke emphatically. "She hasn't run away," she said very positively. "She told me yesterday that she hadn't a place in the world to go, now that her people were all scattered by the war. She's left her things, too. I saw her best hat in the closet the last time I was in her room, and she'd never leave that."

Mrs. Hale hesitated. "Perhaps we'd best look over the room again," she suggested. "It may throw some light on this disappearance."

Amiee's room, however, did not help them at all. They found her things in place and the only matter for surprise about them was their extreme scarcity.

"I thought she had much more clothing than this," exclaimed Mrs. Hale, shutting the almost empty drawers as she rose from her search. "She had such a number of bundles. Two good-sized parcels and a valise. I should have seen to it that she was better equipped," and she sighed as she closed the door behind them. "I have been too much absorbed in that work of mine, I'm afraid."

When they were in the garden again Betsy realized that she was to be left behind. "But I can walk as far as anyone, and I know every spot for miles around," she protested. "I ought to go, too. I'm not a bit tired and——"

She stopped at the reproof in her mother's face. Her feelings got the better of her again when the gate clicked behind them. "I'm going to start out, too, if you're too long," she called, and her mother's answer brought relief to her restless desire to be in action.

"If Emma Clara picks her up on the Highville road, she'll be here in half an hour. If she comes, you must run up on the hill on the short cut and wave something white. I shall look for the signal when the church clock strikes five," Mrs. Hale directed her. Lucy

can see the hill from almost any part of the Norton road, too. Be sure you are on time, my dear."

Betsy watched them start on their separate ways with a sense of sharing responsibility. She went in for her faithful alarm clock, and she brought it down to the summer house. Somehow the silence indoors oppressed her and the lengthening shadows of the hazy sun kept better company with her thoughts.

It was a long, long time before the hands of the clock reached the half hour, when she had decided that Emma Clara must surely appear. The misty hills were turning from blue to violet and the birds were circling on their homeward flight. It was quarter to five when the chug of the gray motor brought her to the gate.

Emma Clara was alone. "I brought you and Amiee some sweeties," she called, dropping a white parcel on the grass beside the palings, and then she was off before Betsy could make up her mind to detain her.

Betsy picked up the white-wrapped box, and put it absently on the table in the summer house. "I guess it's just as well I didn't tell

her," she thought. "Mother or Lucy may have found Amiee by this time."

She watched the clock mechanically, although there was no need of the signal from the hill-top now. Amiee had not come home with Emma Clara. Suddenly Betsy sprang up.

"Alandale!" she cried aloud. "Why, that's where she's gone! I never thought of it till now."

She sank down again as she recalled the distance to Alandale. "Fifteen miles," she remembered, with sudden pity that routed her curiosity. She did not even stop to wonder why Amiee had gone on such a quest. She caught up her sweater and, leaving the alarm clock on the step of the summer house, she ran out of the flag-path gate and across the winding road.

"I'll take the cross-way through the thicket," she decided as she ran along. "I shan't find her, of course, but when I get to the road, perhaps I'll meet someone who has seen her."

Mac was bounding along ahead, but she did not notice. She was intent on getting to

the open road. She did not even look in his direction when he began to bark. It was the brook that halted her. A stepping-stone was missing and she paused for a footing.

And then right before her she saw Amiee!

The French girl was half-sitting among the rocks, and Betsy could see that she was trembling violently.

"Oh, Amiee, wait. I'm coming," she cried and splashed through the water in a panic.

Amiee toppled over before she could reach her, and lay white and motionless upon the ground. She had fainted quite away.

Betsy was not so much frightened as she might have been before her experience with her mother's fainting fits. She was on her knees beside the limp Amiee in a twinkling, and dashed water from the brook on her face and rubbed her hands in a very vigorous fashion. Amiee opened her eyes almost at once and sat up, blinking in a funny way.

Betsy's first words were not at all what she would have chosen. "Did you get to Alandale?" she asked eagerly.

And Amiee answered as a matter of course. "Yes. I had a young lady automobile for the

A Stepping-stone was Missing

on eagerly and yet methodically. "I'll go ever so softly and see if she's sleeping," she thought, enjoying the tip-toe approach to the door on the upper landing. "I'll not make a sound."

She did not make a sound, but it did not matter in the least how quietly she went, for Amiee's door was slightly ajar now, and she could hear the heavy breathing that came from the bed, where Amiee lay.

At the door Betsy paused, and her caution left her. "Oh, Amiee, are you ill?" she cried in distress at the sight. "Are you asleep, or are you ill?"

Amiee lay half dressed on the rumpled bed, her dark hair tumbling down over her white face and her breath coming heavily. She was evidently not sleeping and yet she was unconscious of Betsy's approach. Her half-closed eyes did not either close or open as Betsy spoke, and the heavy, harsh breathing did not change.

"Oh, she must be ill—very, very ill," thought Betsy in sudden panic.

Amiee became in that instant an object of apprehension to her. She could not bring

herself to the bedside, nor could she touch the limp hand that hung over the bed's edge. Her voice shriveled in her throat. She had only a tiny thread of speech.

"Amiee, Amiee, are you awake?" she asked foolishly. She felt she should try to rouse her and see how ill she really was before she went down for help.

Amiee gave no sign, however, and poor Betsy turned a faltering step towards the door. She felt she simply could not approach that dark, mute figure, or touch the limp hands.

"Amiee," she said again from the threshold in a quavering voice. "Amiee!"

Then through the open doorway of her own room she saw the red-white-and-blue glint of the ten-cent flag at the foot of her bed, and a confused memory of all the wounded and maimed in battle tended by heroic comforters flashed through her startled mind, and once again she answered the call of the little banner.

Turning swiftly she went to the bed and, stooping over the limp form, she touched the forehead and hands. They were burning hot, and the heavy breathing was hoarse and

labored as with fever. Undoubtedly Amiee was ill and must be attended to at once. She tucked a cover about the unconscious girl, and, opening a window to the sweet morning air, she sped down-stairs with her unhappy tidings.

"Amiee is ill, and she doesn't wake up and she's breathing dreadfully hard," she told her startled mother. "Shall I call Dr. Stanton right away? I think she is pretty sick. She looks so queer."

Mrs. Hale fluttered up from her seat at the pleasant breakfast table in great distress. She was not used to illness in others, though she could bear her own ailments with bright fortitude. She turned to Lucy, who was entering with the toast, and she spoke with a note of entreaty that was very appealing.

"Will you come up and see Miss Amiee, Lucy? Betsy says she is ill and I know so little of illness. You can help me with her, I am sure."

Lucy set down the toast. Her wholesome face shone with sudden affection for the gifted, helpless little lady before her.

"Sure, I'll come," she responded heartily. "I'll tell you what ails her in two winks.

I've had enough sickness, lands knows, to size up anything from mumps to bronkittis," and she followed Mrs. Hale's slight figure out of the room with a reassuring alacrity.

Betsy looked after her with a breath of relief. Whatever was amiss would be mended, if it were possible, by the strong, capable Lucy. While she was waiting for the telephone operator to give her the doctor's number she recalled that first day when Lucy had dropped Amiee's proffered tip on the floor of the bedroom where she was now so eagerly bending her steps, and the memory brought a flush of gratitude to the reliable, forgiving Lucy. "She'll help Amiee, if anyone can," she thought, and then she got her number and told her little story to Dr. Stanton, who promised to come at once.

When she came into the bedroom opposite her own, Lucy had taken charge of things with an energy that was very comforting. Amiee still lay breathing heavily, but her bed was smoothed and her clothes had been taken off and her night-dress put on; her hair, instead of straying wildly over her face, was neatly braided in two dark braids. The curtains

were drawn and the sunshine was pouring in at the windows. Lucy, at the bedside, motioned Betsy away vehemently.

It was then that Betsy noticed that her mother was not in the room.

"You go out and shut that door," commanded Lucy in firm, kind tones. "You and your ma has got to stay downstairs till after the doctor has been here. There ain't any knowing what it is yet."

"Oh," breathed Betsy, startled by the ominous suggestion. "Is she very ill? Will she—?" She could not bring herself to ask if Amiee would have to go to the hospital while she was lying there before her, even though she was unconscious of all sound and speech.

Lucy threw her a meaning glance. "She's sick enough—that I know," she replied positively. "She ain't got very far in the disease, of course, but we aren't going to take chances on your getting it, whatever it is. Go on down now and make your ma have her breakfast. That's a dear, good girl."

Betsy was too much impressed by the sight of Lucy in command and issuing orders with such firm kindness that she asked not

another question, but went in search of her mother, whom she found in her room searching for disinfectants and bandages in an out-of-the-way closet. To Betsy's horrified question she laughed a little disturbed, half-ashamed laugh.

"There mayn't be a particle of need for them," she explained, "but I thought I'd have them ready in case the doctor found they should be used. Lucy is so very vague and alarming."

Betsy put her arm about the slender waist. Lucy's command was fresh in her mind. "Come down and have breakfast, while we wait for the doctor," she said and together they went down to the cheerful dining-room where the delayed breakfast cooled on the table.

"How different it looks," thought Betsy, glancing about the familiar room. "It isn't a bit like it looked half an hour ago. It's all changed and strange."

She kept that sense of strangeness when the doctor, arriving in cheery mood, came downstairs again with a graver face and pronounced the case a rather severe case of chicken-pox, aggravated by the exposure of the day before.

"She can be taken over to the contagious ward at the hospital if you wish it," he said to Mrs. Hale. "There is a vacancy today, and the ambulance is very comfortable. You will have to be quarantined, of course, but it would relieve you of the trouble and responsibility. The hospital owes you people more than that, and I can answer for it that she shall have the best treatment."

They were in the sitting-room, near the hall door, and Dr. Stanton spoke with reassuring heartiness. The words must have been clearly audible to the capable Lucy, listening on the top landing, for her voice came swift and decided, with a ring in it that was very convincing.

"You don't take this poor child out into any cool air while I'm able to stop you," she called. "I'm going to take care of her, and you can make up your minds to that. She ain't going to be much of a care, I'll be bound; but care or not, she stays here and I take charge of her till she's well."

Mrs. Hale looked at the doctor and the doctor looked at Mrs. Hale. Some question in his eyes must have been answered by her's,

for he called up to the waiting directress at the top landing and he smiled as he made his reply: "It's all right, if you fix it that way, Lucy," he said. "I'll stand by you, and we'll all do our best to help." In a lower tone he said to Mrs. Hale, "It is only a question of a week, I think. She may have complicated matters by her exertions yesterday, but it may turn out that she was more tired than exposed. She may mend quickly, and in that case, Lucy's task will soon be over."

Mrs. Hale shook hands with him in a very grateful manner. "I am so glad to have you decide the matter," she said. "I should have felt I must send her to the hospital, but since you say she can have proper care here, and since Lucy is so positive in her orders, I am thankful that it may rest as it is. Betsy and I will be quite content below stairs, if we are certain that Amiee is being well cared for above."

"You may be sure of that," returned Dr. Stanton, drawing on his gloves. "She—Lucy, I mean—is a cracker-jack. I've never seen a nurse better fitted for her job. You'll

have to be quarantined, of course," he added as an afterthought.

Betsy felt a thrill at this novel prospect. It gave a dignity to Amiee's illness that was rather distressing to her nimble mind. She saw the paper placard on the door, in her mind's eye, and she recalled that the gate would be as securely shut to her wandering feet by that little square of paper as though a hundred guards were mounted over the portals of the Wee Corner. Amiee, ill and unconscious in the upper room, had suddenly shut the familiar avenues of life and brought a cloud of apprehension over the bright sunshine of everyday doings.

"I do hope she isn't going to be very, very ill," she said to her mother as they went back to the task of clearing the table and washing the dishes. "It seems so sad for her to be sick and alone and all that."

A great pity and tenderness for the orphaned girl rose up in her heart. As usual when she was away from Amiee, and more particularly now that Amiee was afflicted, she felt only compassion for the stranger in their home. She determined to love and cherish her

forever after—if she were spared to them. She wondered and worried about Amiee's state all day, and it was her anxious questioning of Emma Clara over the 'phone that brought her some peace of mind at last.

She had called Emma Clara up twice to talk the matter over, and Emma Clara, hearing the real anxiety in her voice, had urged the doctor to a third visit, and it was on his coming downstairs after that third visit that Betsy got her happier news.

"Well, your young lady has given you quite a scare, but it's going to be all right with her now," he told them as he halted in the sitting-room on his way out. "Her fever is going down rapidly. The medicine is acting like a miracle, the patient is quite conscious, and Lucy is grinning like a regular old Cheshire cat. I'll be in tomorrow, of course, but you can be quite content about Amiee now."

Betsy flung her arms about her mother in her great relief. "Oh, Mother dearest, how glad, *glad* I am!" she cried. "We shan't mind being quarantined a bit, now that we know Amiee is getting better, shall we? And it's so splendid in Lucy to take such

good care of her when—" she stopped, confused, for she felt it was impossible to speak of Amiee's apparent dislike of Lucy while the patient and nurse were in such close relationship. "Amiee will just love Lucy when she knows what she has done for her," she ended, cheering herself with the thought.

Mrs. Hale looked at her, but said almost nothing. She, too, may have had some memories of Amiee's indifference to Lucy's persistent kindness. All that she said was: "We'll hope for all sorts of good things—when Amiee gets well," and then she went out to shut up the stove for supper.

Betsy followed more slowly. She was planning delightful scenes wherein the grateful Amiee showered praises on the faithful Lucy, while to Mrs. Hale and to Betsy herself she gave free and full confidences. She told them, in this interesting picture, what her mother and father looked like; where and how they had lived in France; what she had seen in London and New York; and, last of all, why she had gone to Alandale.

"She'll tell us why she went to Alandale," she thought, and she grew more positive on this matter as the hours and days went on.

When Lucy and the doctor pronounced the patient quite well enough to sit up and begin to enjoy life in a limited way, Betsy fairly ached for some news of Amiee's attachment to her faithful nurse. She knew that must come first, before the happier relations with the rest of them. But not a word or sign of such attachment came.

Day after day for that long week she waited for Amiee's heart to melt to her new friends, but she waited in vain. Then she consoled herself with the reflection that it was foolish to expect to *hear* about Amiee's change of heart.

"I'll wait till I see her for myself, and then I'll see how grateful and loving she has grown to be," she thought, touched by her own words almost to tears.

On the day when Amiee, restored, disinfected and in normal health, came down from the third floor with the smiling Lucy following her slow steps, Betsy had the greatest disappointment she had known.

Amiee was politely grateful in speech, and she suffered Lucy to attend her wants with a better grace than she had ever shown before,

but she was still the same quiet, rather stolid, uncommunicative Amiee that she had been ever since she came to the Wee Corner that eventful Sunday afternoon.

"I don't believe she has a bit of a heart," declared Betsy hotly to herself as she flung herself down beside the window in her own dear room and reached for the pincushion with an indignant hand. "She's just the same as ever."

After she had stuck in half a row of shining pins and stuck them in very hard indeed, she began to feel better. She sat up and looked out at the dark sweep of the tall pines against the gold and violet of the sunset.

"She *seems* the same as ever," she amended hopefully, "but I think she must be sweeter in her heart towards us. It's just because she can't show it all at once. I guess she'll be different after a bit. Some day soon she'll tell us all about her home and people and then she'll tell us, too, why she went to Alandale."

She frowned a little as she recalled the devotion which Lucy had lavished on the impervious Amiee. "I'll have to make it up

to Lucy," she thought. "It isn't quite fair to her to do so much and not have someone show they like her a lot better for it. I'll have to make it up to her, so she won't notice that Amiee does not really love her."

Betsy's heart was so warm that it was hard for her to understand how anyone could fail to respond to generous treatment, and she could not see that the griefs and privations which the French girl had undergone, instead of softening her character, had hardened her natural reserve almost to harshness, and made any expression of confidence a painful effort to her. Betsy sighed as she thought of an incident of the day just ending.

Amiee, sitting comfortably in the easy chair by the hearth, had seen Lucy bring in the loaded tea-tray—a special treat in honor of the recovery—and had sat calmly in her chair while the tired Lucy looked about in vain for the table where she usually put the tray. Amiee's school books, which she had got out so soon as she had ended her polite speeches to Mrs. Hale on coming downstairs, were strewn over the surface of the table by the hearth-rug, and it was Betsy who had

sprung up from an absorbing book to help the burdened Lucy.

"Scramble your books off, Amiee, while I straighten the cover," she had urged gaily. "Lucy's arms will drop, holding that great heavy tray!"

Amiee had moved with deliberation, taking her time to arrange her books in her usual neat way, and when Betsy had the cover nicely on and the table was ready for the tray, she had opened one of the books and without a single pleasant word to the careful Lucy, she had gone on with her interrupted studies.

"I'll help you fix the things, Lucy," Betsy had said with eagerness to atone for the neglect. "That toast looks perfectly delicious and the cake is too good to be gobbled down right away. You've made a jolly lot of chocolate, too. Doesn't it look good, Amiee?"

Amiee had turned a rather indifferent eye on the tempting tray. "Lucy has always the custom of making things appear appetizing," she had said, and Lucy had appeared quite content with the faint praise.

"Poor deluded Lucy doesn't know that Amiee hasn't a scrap of time for her now any

more than she ever had," thought Betsy compassionately. "She thinks it's because Amiee is weak and tired, but it isn't that at all. I'll have to keep Lucy from guessing that Amiee will really never care much for any of us, because her whole heart is over there in France. I'll have to manage it somehow."

The warm feeling that came to her as she thought of Lucy's kindnesses to herself as well as to the stranger brought another good resolution.

"I'll be nicer than ever to poor Amiee, just because she can't be pleasant and sociable like the rest of us," she decided, feeling very generous and noble in her forgiving kindness. "I'll try to remember that she is different from us because of the dreadful things that have happened to her, and I won't be snippy and superior ever again when I think of her. For, sometimes in my very secret, secret thoughts, I have been very snippy and superior about her."

The last glow from the sunset was fading before she rose from her comforting corner by the wide window sill. Her smooth brown hair caught the faint pink light from beyond

the pines, and her clear eyes shone with the last gleam of gold. Her look was very earnest and sweet as she blew a kiss to the little ten-cent flag, back in the growing shadows by the bed's foot.

"I'll try once again to make her happy, and I'll try hard," she said aloud. And she added as she turned toward the sound of voices below, "I'll be nice as nice can be, and perhaps after all she'll tell me why she went to Alandale."

## CHAPTER XII

### Amiee Tells Her News

BETSY watched Amiee in eager hope after that afternoon.

"She hasn't changed much in this whole long week," she confessed to herself nearly a fortnight later. "She is terribly slow, I think."

Amiee certainly had not shown any great warmth of manner, either to her nurse or those who were so hospitably inclined to her. She was polite and evidently tried to express the gratitude she knew she should feel, and which she no doubt did feel, but her manner was still constrained and remote, and she moved through the routine of her life at the Wee Corner with a sort of mechanical effort.

She had told Mrs. Hale that she had gone to Alandale because she liked the name and wanted to see the place. It had been said to be like St. Cloud at home, she had heard. She must have gotten lost. She was too tired

and her head hurt too much then to know where she was.

"It was the fever in my veins that misdirected me," she explained. "I could not see the path, I fear."

Mrs. Hale was satisfied with her explanation. It seemed quite reasonable enough to her.

"We'll have to make her feel that we really need her here," she told Betsy very earnestly. It was plain to see that she half believed that Amiee had intended running away, but had changed her mind for some reason.

Betsy responded eagerly. She did not share her mother's fear, but she knew that Amiee needed something to make her happy. "I'll get Selma to take her to the Junior Basket Ball Game in Highville on Saturday—she'll be rested enough by that time. Selma can take one guest. And I'll ask Philip to teach her how to drive, the very next time Dr. Langham lets him have the horse. And I'll think up other things," she told Mrs. Hale. "There'll be plenty to keep her cheerful."

She was quite confident, and, as long as Amiee was in bed, it seemed easy enough to

plan pleasant activities for her. When she rose, however, and took her place at the lunch table the next day, Betsy's faith in her own ability began to waver. "I'll ask Emma Clara and Miss Willie, too," she said, very wisely distrusting herself. "They'll know how to make her happy."

She did not tell either Emma Clara or her old friend Miss Willie of her own disquiet. She merely said that her mother wanted to get Amiee out of doors more and that walks to either the cozy house by the hospital or extra visits to the hospital itself would be very desirable. They both entered into plans for Amiee's benefit.

Miss Willie, on her first visit to her own home, brought over a huge folio of foreign views and made appointments with Amiee to show them to the patients in the reception room. That plan worked very well for two occasions, and then Amiee very modestly said she was not well versed in the English, that the free ward laughed at her speech, and would Ma'mselle excuse her from the lecture.

Emma Clara fared better, though she did not progress very far. She offered to make

Amiee a lovely embroidered best dress, if Amiee would help with the transfers and the embroidery. Amiee dutifully came and sat stitching hour after hour, but her silence was not to be dispelled even by Emma Clara's pleasant efforts. When the dress was done and wrapped in its tissue paper wrappings, Emma Clara felt that she was not much further on the way to friendship than before they had begun their task.

"She's a strange girl," she told the anxious Betsy, summing up the matter. "She seems to be always thinking of something else, as though she had something on her mind. I suppose it's because she can't get used to us."

"Philip says she's learned to drive already," Betsy answered. "And Selma says she was asked to join that Junior Basket Ball Team in Highville because she played splendidly after they showed her how, after the match was over. They didn't ask me when I went with Selma, you know. So it shows she isn't always absent-minded, like she is with us."

Mrs. Hale was busy with the plans for her new book, all the while she was correcting

proof and having consultations for the novel which was to come out soon. She saw that Amiee was well clothed and taken care of. She sent them to Highville with Lucy to the moving pictures on a couple of Saturday afternoons. She took them to town with her once, lunching at a pretty café, and buying Amiee instead of Betsy the new collar. That was all she could do in those busy weeks in November, while the care of the French girl gradually gave way to the insistent matters of business that meant so much to the welfare of the Wee Corner.

"I think she's quite reconciled to being here," she said thoughtfully to Betsy one afternoon when they were coming in from a short walk. "Don't you find that she is brighter than she used to be?"

Betsy hesitated. "I don't know," she replied doubtfully. "She knows our ways better, of course, but I don't know *her* any better. Perhaps she'll be more at home when Christmas comes. If Philip hadn't gone off to school, he could have helped a lot. He always knows just what to do."

Mrs. Hale was on the front step and her

mind was already busy with the fascinating sheets up-stairs on her desk. She smiled her pretty smile. "He'll be here for the holidays, you know," she said absently. "Just a bit over three weeks, my dear," and she went in, humming a song as she closed the door.

Betsy watched Amiee make her tour of inspection to the frozen garden. She was so accustomed to it that she hardly noticed it. She was thinking of Philip and the Christmas holidays.

"There will be plenty of good times then," she said aloud as Amiee joined her. "We are going to have three parties, one at Emma Clara's and one at—some other place," she caught herself in time to save Miss Willie's secret, "and one at the Shrubberies. Helen told me in that letter today that they were coming for two weeks and were going to have a big party for all the people they knew—a regular Christmas party, she says, with a Christmas tree for everyone and hide-and-seek and all that. There's the Sunday-school festival, that's fun. And we're going to have a candy-pull, and a pop-corn roast, and a New Year's gathering here in the Wee

Corner. You'll have a perfectly lovely time, Amiee."

Amiee smiled rather wistfully. She was fingering something in her pocket that looked like a letter. Betsy could see the tip of it sticking out between Amiee's thumb and finger. "Ah, if I am here," she said in a low tone. "You may not keep me here for those good times."

Betsy looked at her in surprise. "Why, of course you'll be here," she cried. "There isn't anything that's happened to make you want to go away is there?"

Amiee shook her head very hard. "Nothing to make me want to go," she declared solemnly. "I was fearing that you might desire it. One does not know about these things. It is difficult to make up the mind about such things."

There was something in her manner and in the restless fingering of the blue paper in her pocket that impressed Betsy. "What do you mean?" she asked.

Amiee looked at her, hesitated for an instant, and then closed her lips. "It is of nothing," she answered evenly.

Betsy watched her disappear with a sense of having been near a disclosure of some sort. "I wish she'd told me what she meant," she thought. "She surely meant something. Perhaps she'll tell me later."

Amiee did not speak of her presence at the Christmas festivities again, although Betsy tried to lure her confidence at various times. She evaded the inquiries with such a calm manner that Betsy came to the conclusion that her own imagination had been playing her tricks. "I'm always seeing stars when it's raining, Phil says," she told herself with a laugh. "What's the use bothering?"

So she forgot her words with Amiee and began her preparations for the coming holidays with a light heart. They had spent a quiet Thanksgiving, owing to their wish to shield Amiee from too sharp a contrast to her own desolated life. Mrs. Hale was determined that the Christmas season should make up to Betsy for the deprivation. Lucy entered into her plans with real interest, and began weeks before to gather stores for the season.

"You'll be glad you have a house of your own to keep Christmas in, and, mark my

words," she told the eager Betsy, "Folks in boarding houses don't sense Christmas at all."

Those early weeks in December were filled to the brim. Betsy almost forgot her letter to Major Gordon in the host of pleasant duties that the advent of the winter brought. She had written to him at the New York address, and later Helen had told her that both Major and Mrs. Gordon were in Washington again. She spoke of their family doings, but made no mention of her new stepfather personally. Betsy, impatient at first, gradually came to the conclusion that he had forgotten all about the matter, and proceeded to follow his example.

The snow came with a sudden flurry about the middle of the month and then the ice, and she had the double excitement of learning to skate and coast, and try to coax Amiee to share the sports which she and Selma loved. Emma Clara often joined them, in spite of being "Mrs. Doctor" and mistress of a roomy house, and she taught Betsy how to steer a big flexible flyer with great skill, beside showing her how to skate backwards the third time she was on the ice.

Amiee did not speak again of either her strange visit to Alandale or her reason for feeling that she might not be welcome at the holiday making at the Wee Corner. She seemed to be trying very hard to become as much one of them as she could. She wobbled about on the skates, she went coasting resolutely, she studied and sewed and made Christmas kits with the others. Since the snow had come she gave only an occasional glance at the smooth white covering of her garden bed.

"She's queer, though, with it all," said Selma one afternoon when they were busy with their needles at the Friday Sewing Class. "She hasn't spoken a word this whole hour. I wish she'd talk about her father or mother sometimes. It's funny she never will speak of them."

Betsy was intent on a buttonhole, a very obstinate one, too. She hardly heard Selma, who spoke louder, repeating her remark. Betsy merely murmured her annoyance at the refractory buttonhole. She was used to Selma's rambling speeches, but Amiee looked up with a flush mounting to her forehead. She had evidently heard very plainly.

"Oh, bother, now she'll be hurt and perhaps won't look at me," thought Selma.

To her surprise Amiee brought her chair over to where they sat. She did not speak, but merely sat and sewed with an air of resolute attention. It made Selma very uncomfortable. She was glad when the class was over.

That evening when Betsy and Amiee were hurrying home through the snowy twilight Amiee spoke suddenly.

"This Christmas which comes next week," she began hastily, "is a season of good-will, is it not? It is to forgive and be kind? That is the meaning here at the Wee Corner?"

Betsy, with her hands deep in her pockets and a happy little Christmas tune running through her head, nodded. "That's it," she replied gaily. "Everyone wants to be kind at Christmas time. Peace on earth, good-will to men, you know." Then she gave a skip for sheer joy in the words. "Philip will be home tomorrow," she said with a laugh. "Won't it be good to see him again?"

Amiee stood still on the icy pathway. "It is not well that I play the cheat at this good-

will time," she said with trembling lips. "Madame may send me away, but I must tell the truth."

Betsy stared with astonishment. Then she went close to the white-faced Amiee. "Tell me about it," she urged kindly. She was very sorry for her, and she was conscious of a great curiosity, too. At the back of her mind she thought, "Now we shall know about the Alandale trip and the moonlight digging." Those forgotten incidents came back sharply at that moment.

Amiee hesitated, swallowed hard, and then shot out her bolt.

"I had a news of my father a fortnight ago," she said. "He is alive. He is much broken in body, though his memory has at last come back. For long he did not know who he was, but now he knows. He is in a hospital and will not be like other men, for he has but one hand and foot. Shall I have to leave at once?"

Betsy stared harder. "Why should you go?" she asked mechanically. She could not understand.

"Because I am not a two-sided orphan, an

orphan without parents, as I was brought to you," replied Amiee, with tight lips. "I feared to tell my news from the good Madame Koot because she warned me that Madame Hale had wished an orphan of undoubted bereavement."

Betsy understood and her lips curved to a laugh. "Oh, how could you think such a foolish thing?" she cried, and then the sad side of it struck her and the quick tears of pity stood in her brown eyes. "Oh, how could you think such a foolish thing?" she cried in quite another tone, and she seized Amiee's hand with a warm clasp.

"Come along and tell Mother," she urged. "She'll be dreadfully glad to hear all about it. Of course she won't send you away. When did you hear about him? And where is he? It's perfectly glorious news—just a real Christmas present!"

Amiee's fears gave way before her enthusiasm and when Mrs. Hale showed her delight in the happy tidings and even wished that her father might share their holiday, if that had only been possible, she actually broke down in her relief and shed some large tears.

"It is a veritable season of good-will that comes to me here," she said, gratefully. "I did not know that I should be so comfortable with a father yet alive." She wiped her eyes and added with spirit. "I should have gone to him if he had but the smallest place for me. I shall write to him, if the letter will but arrive."

Betsy was so excited over the news that she begged to run over to Selma with it, and she ran off at once, leaving Amiee explaining the manner Madame Koot's information had come to her. She was not deeply interested in the details.

"Amiee's father is alive," she called, as she came into the hall. "Aimee's father is in a French hospital. He isn't dead at all."

Selma came out of the dining-room where she had been helping Susan to set the table. She was interested deeply in the news. "I guess that's why she looked so queer when I spoke about fathers and mothers today," she said with a satisfied nod. Selma liked to see things clearly.

"I suppose so," returned Betsy easily. "It was a secret, and it was on her mind. Now she can be happy as she pleases. She hasn't anything to hide."

After she had talked it over again, she left Selma with her bundle of knives and forks still in her hand, and she went back through the pale light of the waning crescent.

The lights from the Wee Corner were winking a welcome as she came down past the beechwood copse. Betsy blew a kiss to them in sheer lightness of heart.

"It will all be different now," she said to herself. "She hasn't anything to hide."

As she swung the gate she saw Amiee through the window, sitting quietly at the table with her books. Something in the downward looking features recalled a memory of that day in early November when Amiee had fainted by the birch in the thicket.

"I wonder why she went to Alandale? And what she meant by digging her garden in the moonlight?" she thought. "I wish I could ask her about them, too."

## CHAPTER XIII

### Mac and the Parsley Bed

"WHAT a perfectly lovely morning it is," said Betsy. "It's almost like summer, such a change! The snow is all melted on the road and around the house here. The coasting's done for, and the skating, too, for a while, I guess. Oh, here's a letter from Phil—a real big fat letter at last."

Mrs. Hale looked up from her own mail with an interested smile. "At last," she echoed. "I'll be glad to hear what he says. He has put us off with postals and two-line letters every week since he has been away. I hope he tells us all about himself, how he likes the school and the boys, and whether he is coming to us for the holidays."

"Well, if he doesn't—" threatened Betsy, tearing the end of the envelope. "I've written him two letters about it and if he doesn't answer this time——"

She opened the sheet with its printed heading, and read eagerly. "Oh, he's sick, and perhaps can't come!" she exclaimed, looking at her mother with her eyes full of disappointed tears. "Oh, it won't be half so nice without Phil."

"He can't be so very ill, if he is allowed to write so long a letter," Mrs. Hale told her. "Read on, my dear, and see what he really does say."

Betsy began again, and her face cleared at once. "Dear Bets:—I am laid up in the hospital here and as I have not a thing to do I thought I would write that letter about the Christmas holidays. It is very kind of Mrs. Hale to ask me and I will be glad to come on the twenty-fourth—" she read, and then had to stop to exult. "Dear old Phil, he'll be here after all," she cried with sparkling eyes. "What fun it will be!"

Mrs. Hale again broke in on her: "Why is he in the hospital?" she asked anxiously. "Doesn't he tell you what is the matter with him? He is usually so well that one feels alarmed."

"I have had a cold in my head and the

boobs here thought I was going down with the rest of the bunch that got sick. Some of the fellows were over at Newton for a game"—and then followed a long description of a football contest between Brown Prep and the Seniors—"and they caught cold or something coming home in the machines and we had a regular epidemic of scares. The Doc thought they were in for pneumonia and they kept those poor ginks in hospital for one good whole week before they found out it was only a cold. That is, the fellows said it was only a cold. The nurses would not peep a word about it. I guess they were ashamed of making such a mistake.

"Anyway, I was clapped into jail here at the first snuffle. There isn't a thing the matter with me. I am well as can be. It is something fierce to have to sit around, and they won't let me study, either. That is why I am writing such a long letter. It kills time."

They laughed over the picture of his indignation, as Betsy read on. "There ought to be a law against keeping a fellow in hospital when he is not sick. I am going to see to things like that when I am on the job.

I have lost muscle like a sieve. I will have to slave to make up. Tell Lucy I would like to have some of her good oatmeal cakes just now. But I suppose they would not let me have them. They might not be good for *a cold in the head!*" At the end of the letter this sarcasm seemed to weigh on his mind, for he added, in a scribbled postscript: "They are a good sort. The nurses and old Doc have been fine to me."

Mrs. Hale laughed as she began her delayed breakfast. "I don't believe they are very badly treated, after all," she said. "Those football heroes must have deserved all that they got. They ought to be thankful they had good care, but it isn't in the average boy to be thankful for any care unless he is laid up in bed, so ill he can't stir."

Betsy was brimming over with happiness. The length of the letter delighted her and the description of the game, although it had been played between two teams she had never seen, was full of interest for her because Philip, her dear chum, was interested in it. She thrilled with pride at the suggestion of his intentions when he was in power. The

memory of that summer day by the brook when he had told her of his secret ambition to become a surgeon came vividly back to her. She wished she could explain to her mother how much that little sentence in the letter meant.

"It's going to be perfectly lovely to have dear old Phil here for the holidays, isn't it?" she said joyfully. "Aimee will be quite like the rest of us all by that time, I believe, and we'll have such good times here in the Wee Corner. Everything seems to be getting nicer and nicer all the time now."

Lucy with the toast interrupted the flow of her thoughts. A sudden memory of the before-breakfast run came to her and she asked: "Has Mac come back, Lucy? I couldn't find him anywhere around when I was out in the garden."

Lucy stiffened and a stubborn expression came over her kind face. "I ain't done anything with him," she declared rather warmly. "You don't like for me to shut him in the stable and so I don't do it."

Betsy's face clouded. "He hasn't been at the parsley bed again?" she asked in great concern. "It was all uncovered, I saw—."

Lucy looked more relentless than ever. "I hoped not, too," she replied, shortly. "I hoped he might leave alone that one spot in the whole blessed place that was needed for real food. He could have dug himself black in the face in those wilty flower beds and harmed no one's food, but he needs must go pick out that parsley bed, that I've covered with straw and leaves and kept warm and green, and he needs must choose that for his cast-off dirty bones that he never looks at again."

She stopped for breath and Betsy anxiously interposed: "But Lucy——"

"Please don't say 'but Lucy' to me," returned Lucy obstinately. "I haven't done him a mite of harm. I just switched him a bit and serve him right. I'm done with his nonsense and his old bones. I didn't hurt him enough to make him howl and he's gone off on some ja'nt of his own, skin-whole and happy, I'll bet. He'll be back before you've done, I dare say."

As she stalked out of the room with her head in the air, Mrs. Hale laid a soothing hand on Betsy's arm. "Lucy has done

entirely right, Betsy-girl, and Mac hasn't been harmed, you may be sure. We can trust Lucy for that, I think," she said gently. "Mac needed to be disciplined for his tricks with that parsley bed, and a little switching may cure him of it. The snow kept him from digging but now he must understand that it is time for him to give up and behave himself. Don't worry over it, my dear. He has only got what he needed and I am grateful to Lucy for doing it. He'll be back after a while and I think he'll be all the happier, as Lucy says, for the bit of discipline."

Betsy's expression changed as her mother spoke, and by the time Mrs. Hale had ended her face was cleared and shining again. When her mother gave an opinion Betsy knew that it was good. She dismissed Mac from her mind and turned to the happier theme of the Christmas holidays with Philip and Miss Willie and all the other good friends about them.

"Just to think that it hasn't been a year since we came," she wondered. "And we have more friends here—real friends—than we had before in all the places we went after

father left us. It will be heavenly to have a tree in our own house, and to help trim the church, and go around on Christmas afternoon to see Selma's presents and to have holiday tea with Emma Clara."

Her mind was so filled with Philip's visit and her happy expectations that she had to go up to Amiee's room where Amiee was at work on her lessons, and tell her all about the letter, reading the account of the football game and laughing over the dismal picture of the imprisoned Philip.

Amiee was more interested than she had shown herself—anything that pertained to Philip always roused her interest—and Betsy found, to her great satisfaction, that she had overstayed her time in Amiee's room and was late with her bed-making and consequently with her lesson hour. She came down to her mother with her satisfaction in evidence. She could not help boasting a little.

"I told Amiee about Phil's long letter, and we had such a nice time together that I forgot to do my work," she confessed with a triumphant air that did not escape her mother.

Mrs. Hale took no further notice of Betsy's manner than to say pleasantly, "I am glad Amiee is feeling better this morning. I was afraid the coasting yesterday might have tired her too much."

"Oh, she's quite rested, and she is really going to be happier, I think," explained Betsy, who was determined that her mother should notice the improvement that she had found in the usually indifferent Amiee. I'm going up with her before lunch and we're going to make Christmas things; at least, I'm going to show her how to make some—that is, if she wants to."

Mrs. Hale smiled a bit at the growing uncertainty of Betsy's sentences, but she said nothing. She seemed to feel that all would be well.

"She might make one of those pretty pincushions for Miss Willie," she suggested. "Don't forget that you have your own lessons to prepare, though."

"I'll be through them in no time, they're so easy today," answered Betsy gaily, as she settled down to the desk. And really she took to her lessons with avidity, hoping to

dispose of them rapidly and so gain more time with Amiee. "I'll take up some pink silk and a little of that lace I got last week," she thought as she began her French history. "She'll be sure to like that. And those pincushions are just sweet!"

It may have been that she got the sweetness of the pincushions mixed with the terrors of the French Revolution, or it may have been that the football game came between her and the early English verse that her mother had set her to put into modern English, but whatever it was, she made very poor progress with her lessons and was later than usual in finishing her papers.

When she rushed to her room in a frantic search for the pink silk and lace that was to charm Amiee into entire friendliness she lost another quarter of an hour, because she forgot that she had left her scissors and thimble downstairs. When she finally had her belongings in shape and tip-toed into Amiee's room it was nearly twelve o'clock.

"I'm awfully late, but I got twisted up among the Sans-culottes and then I couldn't for the life of me remember what a word in

the Canterbury Pilgrims meant in our every-day talk," she said brightly although a bit breathlessly. "I've brought something pretty, though, and I'll show you how to make the cutest doll pin-cushion with pink skirts and lace tunic that you ever saw. It will make a lovely present for Miss Willie, if you're going to give her one."

Amiee looked up at her. She seemed entirely changed, but there was no expression of interest such as there had been earlier in the morning. "I think I shall not give the gifts this year," she told Betsy in her usual even tone. "I shall only present a trifle to Madame your mother, and she will not love a pink doll pin-cushion, I have certainty."

It was a severe repulse, and Betsy fairly gasped at the reverse of her buoyant hopes. She did not say anything, however, and as Amiee had closed her eyes as she began speaking, no one saw the light fade from Betsy's vivid face and the expression of keen disappointment that took its place. She stood a minute just inside the door, trying to find something that would not betray her, but no words came and Amiee did not say any more. It was a very discouraging moment.

After a little silence that seemed very long to poor Betsy, she found her voice. Amiee's changed tone hurt her deeply. She had to struggle with her voice at first, but it soon grew warm under the impulse of sudden thought.

"If you made something,—anything, for your father and sent it straight off, he'd get it for Christmas, wouldn't he?" she asked. "He'd love it—from you!"

Amiee turned swiftly and looked at her. "Oh, I had not thought of that," she cried transformed at once. "I thought only of purchasing—and I had no right to spend. . . What shall I do?"

Betsy had not the slightest idea, but she was not dismayed. The light in Amiee's face inspired her with confidence. "I don't know this very instant," she replied quickly, "but we'll find *something*. I'll skip down and look through the magazines that Emma Clara brought over, and you'd better come down, too. We'll talk it over with Mother."

Amiee responded quickly. "It will be of a great joy to do that," she said. "I was feeling that the Christmas-time was not for

me, but now I shall be like the rest—I have someone pertaining to myself to make a gift for. I shall come down soon, for my lessons are almost done."

Betsy ran down eagerly, but though her mother was not in, she was not cast down.

"I'll run down to the brook before Amiee gets down," she said to herself. "Perhaps old Mac is back and we'll have a race, after all."

She left her sewing neatly folded in a corner of the wide window-sill, and, with tam and sweater, she hurried out of doors. The sunshine was bright and warm and the snow had gone from the open levels. It was a day for happiness and Betsy's spirits rose as she stepped out.

Mac was nowhere to be found, although she ran to the barn and even to the parsley bed, whistling his peculiar call very loud and clear. "I'll have to go without him," she thought regretfully, but as she scampered off, even Mac's absence faded in the sheer joy of living. The sparkling air brought the blood dancing to her cheeks and the crackle of dry leaves sent a pleasant pungent odor to her nostrils.

At the brook she paused and, stooping, drank from the little hollow where the spring bubbled up among the rocks above the stepping-stones. The water was like the air, clear and vivifying, and she straightened up with an exuberant toss of her brown head. She laughed out loud in very buoyancy of spirit. The brook, bubbling among its brown aged stones, laughed and bubbled, too, and Betsy loved it for its merry chuckle. "You're as good as a real person," she said aloud, stooping again to catch a handful in her palm. "You're as jolly as the Nickleman and a whole lot nicer."

She flung the shining drops out into the sunshine and smiled to see them glisten like diamonds as they fell. She had a sense of real companionship with the brook. In the sunny stillness it seemed a real, living presence.

She started, however, at the crackle of dried leaves. The brook seemed to slip back into being a mere brook again as she heard steps behind her. Before she could turn a familiar voice called her.

"What in the world are you doing, Betsy

Hale, talking out loud to yourself in the woods like that?" Selma's mild accents demanded of her. "Are you going feeble-minded, like old Mrs. Sanders?" she asked as she came up across the mossy uneven ground to where Betsy stood. "Talking out loud in the woods is very queer indeed, I think."

Betsy had been too much absorbed in her little episode to come back to realities at once, but by the time Selma's second question was spoken she was quite her brisk active self again. She laughed at Selma's grave reproof, and ran to fling her arms about her friend's neck in an outbrust of unusual emotion. Selma had never seemed so dear and sweet as she did at that moment.

"You dear old thing," she said with a very hard squeeze. "I wasn't going crazy, I was just talking to the brook—it's such a relief in the winter time and frost to find it laughing and singing out here in the sun. But I'd rather talk to you any time. Come along and let's cuddle down on the big stump and talk a while. I don't have to go in right away. Do you?"

Selma had no intention of going home at once, she told Betsy with an air of pleasant mystery, and she settled herself beside Betsy with her feet tucked up comfortably and her hands cuddled in the sleeves of her pink sweater. It was very delightful indeed to feel the warm comradeship of her presence, added to her recent triumph over Amiee's dark mood.

"I went to the house for you," she began, enjoyably, and then Betsy knew she had something interesting to tell.

"Oh, has Miss Willie gotten any more pictures for the Red Cross—" she intertupted, quickly. "She told me she was going to get some from Mrs. Stone. I do hope they aren't so very dreadful as those last poor wounded-soldier ones that Mr. Long got. They are so shuddery and so true."

Selma waited patiently for her to finish. She was seldom in a hurry with her news. Perhaps that was why Betsy enjoyed it so much.

"It isn't about Miss Willie at all," she explained tranquilly. "It's about her house, though."

"It hasn't burnt down?" flashed Betsy,

and answered herself in a breath. "No, you wouldn't be looking like that, if it had."

"No, it hasn't burnt down," replied Selma calmly. "It's all right. But it might have been burnt down or—or—anything, if it hadn't been for your Mac." She went on now without heeding Betsy's eager interruptions. "You see, Mrs. O'Brien goes every morning to clean Miss Willie's house, to tend fires, too, in case Miss Willie goes home (you know she says she's going now, and Dr. Stanton says she shan't go alone); and Mrs. O'Brien keeps everything ready, for no one knows who will have their way, Miss Willie or Dr. Stanton, and though it *is* lonely, it is her home——"

"Yes, yes, I know all that," Betsy determinedly broke in. "Get on with Mac and the house, do, please."

"Well, then, when Mrs. O'Brion went there this morning she says she was crying so she could hardly see," Selma went on cheerfully. "She was perfectly certain she locked the kitchen door, but of course she couldn't have locked it. She remembers that while she was bringing in some coal from the shed

Mac came snooping in with her, but she thought she had sent him out. She was feeling so dreadfully, you see, that she hardly knew what she was doing. She must have left him in the kitchen without knowing it, and gone out without locking either the kitchen door or snapping the padlock on the shed. It must have been so, of course, as you will see."

She paused here for a moment, arranging her story, and Betsy kept herself well in hand. She knew when Selma really began to tell her story that an interruption meant going back to the very first and telling it all over again.

"So Mac was shut in the house all the morning, and when the man came he must have been asleep under the stove, like he is so often, and didn't hear him at first," Selma said slowly. "When Mr. Handy James came along that way from his wood-lot—he's the constable, you know." She waited for Betsy's eager nod before going on. "When Mr. Handy James came along from his wood-lot where he was cutting wood, all he knew was that he heard a great barking all of a sudden

and the next thing he knew a man dashed out from Miss Willie's back way and ran like lightning across the garden, and Mac was hanging onto the leg of his trousers!"

Betsy thrilled but would not speak. She was too eager to hear the rest.

"Yes, he was hanging onto the leg of the tramp's trousers," Selma told her, nodding seriously. "And Mr. Handy knew there was something wrong, so he just ran after the man. He's a good runner because he used to be in the Fourth of July Sports, and so he caught up to them in a wink, and he got the tramp safe and sound. Being constable, you know, he could do that sort of thing. And he took him right straight off to Father, and, oh, it's been very exciting! Father told us all about it just now and I simply rushed over to tell you."

She went on: "Mrs. O'Brien cried like anything when she found she'd left the house open. She's afraid Miss Willie won't have her work for her now. And it was so funny of Mr. Handy to bring Mac along to Father's office—just as though he could be a real witness. It's all right now, though. The

tramp's safe and sound and won't be sneaking into people's back doors for a while, I guess."

Betsy was so excited that she simply could not keep her feet tucked up on the stump. She jumped down and stood before Selma. "Where's Mac now?" she demanded. "What did they do with him?"

She was ready to fly to his rescue if need be. All memories of the parsley bed had vanished for her and she repeated her question. "Where is he?"

"Oh, he's up at your house, getting his breakfast," smiled Selma. "I tried to coax him with me to find you—I knew I'd find you right away with him to lead the way—but Lucy made such a fuss over him that I couldn't make him even look at me. She certainly does think a lot of that dog, doesn't she? It seemed as if she couldn't do enough for him. She gave him three big bones and a lot of biscuit. He couldn't possibly eat half of the stuff."

Betsy's mind flashed to the possible picture of Mac, with the bones in his mouth, repairing to the parsley bed, and a quick

wonder as to the outcome of Lucy's forgiving generosity came to her forcibly. She took a step and motioned to Selma. "Let's go now," she said. "I promised to be there when Amiee comes down and it will be fun to tell her all about it."

Selma agreed, as she always agreed to Betsy's suggestions. She untucked her feet and hopped down from the stump and linked her arm in Betsy's. "I have to be back for dinner, too," she said amiably, "but I guess I can stop a minute. Is Amiee as nice as she was yesterday? She was almost like one of us—only quieter, of course. She'll never be like you, though," she added with quick loyalty. "You're always different."

Betsy's intention to confide Amiee's lapse faded before those generous words. There was no use in telling, now that Amiee was her new self again. "She's going to make Christmas gifts with me now," she replied, proud to be able to say it truthfully. "She'll be waiting, so let's hurry."

Selma halted. "That reminds me that I've got to get that sweater done for Aunt Hattie for the three o'clock mail," she said hastily. "Oh, bother, I can't come, after all."

"Oh, come along, I'll help with the sweater after lunch," urged Betsy, eager for Selma to see for herself. "Amiee will like to hear you tell about Mac. You always tell every last scrap, you know. Not like the way I scurry through my tellings."

Selma simply could not resist this, and she scampered along, keeping up with Betsy's dancing feet. "Miss Willie oughtn't to go to that house by herself," she repeated, as they hurried along. "Mother says that now it's sheer madness, even if she is almost well."

"But she loves it so," said sympathetic Betsy. "I know I'd fight tooth and nail to come home to the Wee Corner."

"That's different," declared Selma stubbornly. "The Wee Corner is neat and pretty and you aren't all alone."

"I'd want to come, even if I were," retorted Betsy, unconvinced. "And I think it's a sin to keep people away from the place they are hankering after. Remember how soon Si Myers got well when he came home? Miss Willie's right, I think."

"And I think Dr. Stanton's right," replied Selma firmly "Miss Willie will have to

give in. . . . There's Mac," she ended so suddenly that Betsy gave a start. "What a big bone!"

"Where?" asked Betsy, searching the regions of the parsley bed in vain.

"There, goosey, by the shed door," Selma told her. "Lucy's allowed him to chew that big bone on the mat, too! She's perfectly silly over him now."

Betsy ran to pat the heroic Mac's rough head, and to exchange a word with the smiling Lucy, and then she ran after Selma to the sitting-room, where Amiee was waiting.

"I don't believe Mac will ever dig in that bed again," she thought, happily. "And I'm sure Selma is wrong about Miss Willie. Selma *is* mistaken about people, for she said Amiee wouldn't change, and she has,—even if she does slip back once in a while, she has changed."

She found Selma ending her recital of Mac's exploit to a very attentive Amiee and her spirits rose still more at the sight. All was going well, indeed.

Selma halted at the door for a final repetition, after her habit. "Miss Willie's bent

on going home at once, but Emma Clara and Doctor say she shall not budge a step. They aren't going to let her be there alone. It was bad enough before, but now that tramps are about, they just won't hear to her staying alone any more. I don't know what they'll do about it."

## CHAPTER XIV

### Major Gordon's Letter

"IT is quite a weight off my mind to see that Amiee begins to behave more like other girls," said Mrs. Hale a few days later. "I was beginning to feel that we had made a mistake in bringing her here."

Betsy assented rather doubtfully. "She is better than she used to be," she admitted. "I suppose it was hard on her to come among strangers at first, and then to decide what to do about telling of her father being alive, feeling like she did. She talks a lot more, now that's off her mind, and Miss Willie says she's been over to see her—not just the hospital, but Miss Willie herself—twice a day since. Miss Willie likes her ever so much, you know."

Mrs. Hale nodded. "She is really quite well now—Miss Willie, I mean. Dr. Stanton told me yesterday that he was only keeping her there because he didn't want her to go back

to that lonely house of her's. He thinks it unwholesome for her to be so much alone, particularly since the tramp episode."

"He says that because he's just married," she said wisely. "He thinks every one is lonely that isn't married. Miss Willie likes her own house." She thought of the fascinating mystery of that house with a throb of envy. No wonder Miss Willie wanted to go back, tramps or no tramps.

Mrs. Hale sealed the last letter and handed it to Betsy. "He's quite determined that she shall not live alone, at all events," she said, turning to a pile of papers on her desk. "I don't know what Miss Willie has to say about it, but I fancy it will be worth hearing, for she has a very decided mind of her own. Hurry along now, or you'll miss the stage. The train was up long ago."

Betsy hurried off with the letters, thinking of Miss Willie Welch. She dropped the mail in the slit and went out on the store porch to wait till the incoming mail had been sorted. All the while her mind was busy with Miss Willie and Dr. Stanton's words.

"If she gets someone to live with her I

wonder how she'll manage about the Outer and Inner Courts?" she thought. "I suppose she'd have to have the whole house open then. And the garden—what would she do to that? Would she cut and trim it like everybody's else garden? Oh, dear, I hope not!"

She was filled with the problem as she took the one letter from Mr. Higbee through the little arch on the post office counter, and she went out still absorbed, glancing mechanically at the letter as she closed the door behind her.

"Why, it's for me," she said in surprise. The official-looking envelope was addressed in a strange hand, and she tore it open, wondering greatly. She glanced at the signature.

"It's from Major Gordon," she said aloud. And running her eye down the sheet she caught the name LaLanne repeated here and there. "It's about Amiee's mother," she whispered joyously, and she ran down the steps in a flurry of delightful anticipation, casting her usual look back over her shoulder at the big flag as she went.

"If I've found Amiee's mother for her,

I've done *something*," she thought, as she raced along. "It isn't like going for a nurse, or that sort of thing. But it's something."

She was in her own room in a jiffy, and although she was on fire to read her letter, she went over to the little flag by the foot of her bed and she pressed her lips to it, feeling very devoted and patriotic. "It's only a ten-cent service," she whispered. "But it brings happiness to the desolate war orphan."

She was quite touched by that, and she sat down by the window to her letter with a moisture dimming her eyes. She could hardly see the words. When she really saw them clearly, her face began to change, and as she read, a look of acute disappointment gathered. She ended the sheet and stared out at the tall pines.

"He hasn't found her at all," she said, and she read it all over again.

It was a very kind letter. Major Gordon had taken great pains to make his search for Madame LaLanne as thorough as time and influence could make it. No trace of anyone of that name had been found until late in November he had come upon the fact that

some time in 1918 a person by the name of LaLanne, whether male or female was not known, had arrived at New York with some other persons and had promptly disappeared completely. It was probable, as the other two persons of the party had died since from exposure and shock, that the person named LaLanne was also deceased. The Major assured Betsy that he had made such search as was possible under existing conditions, without avail. He ended with the kindest expressions of regret, and the comforting persuasion that there had no doubt been a mistake in the name, and that no LaLanne had really come to America. He would make inquiries as to anyone of that name when he reached France, which would be in a very short time.

Betsy was too much disappointed to care for this assurance. She felt that she had been a bit ahead of time in her exultation. The desolate war orphan was not an atom better off than before. She looked at the little flag with a flush rising to her cheeks. Then suddenly she flung back her head and laughed. Her grand patriotic airs seemed very funny to her.

"I won't tell Amiee about it, though," she thought, sobering a bit. "It would stir her all up for nothing."

She was rather glad that her promise kept her from confiding in her mother, since there really was nothing to tell. "Phil will be home tomorrow, and I'll show the letter to him," she told herself, and felt relieved to dispose of the matter. "It's a pretty dismal letter for Christmas time, and I'm glad that I can't talk about it. It would make everyone sorry and blue."

She tucked it away in her deepest drawer. "I've done what I could, anyway," she said, and then went downstairs to help Amiee with her Christmas presents.

Amiee had at first refused to join in the pleasant Christmas custom of giving of gifts. Although the two girls had exactly the same small allowance from Mrs. Hale for their weekly needs, she had protested against even a post card. "It wouldn't be fair," was all that she would reply to Betsy's eager persuasions. Since Betsy had convinced her, she had turned about. She was anxious to make some small gifts with her own hands. Miss

Willie, Emma Clara, Philip and, strangest of imagined persons, Jimmy Delaney were the subjects of much planning, and a number of small suitable articles had been evolved with Betsy's help.

Amiee was sewing diligently on a pretty tea-cozy patterned after Mrs. Hale's birthday present from Selma, except instead of a Dutch boy Amiee had chosen a fairy with pink skirts. "Miss Willie does like her tea very warm," she said as Betsy joined her. "She will welcome this gift for its use."

"She'll like it for your sake, too," Betsy told her earnestly. Somehow she felt that she must make up to Amiee for not having found a mother for her.

Amiee's dark face brightened. "She is most kind, that Ma'mselle Miss," she said with more warmth than usual. "I grow more clear-sighted for her kindness every day."

"Did you hear that Dr. Stanton won't let her go home by herself?" asked Betsy. "Oh, dear, I suppose I shouldn't have said that, but you won't speak of it of course. Give me that last wristlet for Jimmy. I'll put on a few rows while you finish the cozy. Have

you seen Mrs. Delaney today? I haven't been to the hospital since Monday——"

Amiee's exclamation interrupted her. "Ah, I have forgot the message," Amiee said with an amused air. "That good Mrs. Delanee said I must of a certainty tell you that important message from Jimmee. He sends the word that we shall each, Selma and you and I, have a veritable Christmas gift from him on the morning of the Christmas. It is something to please us much, and he will bring it himself.

Betsy listened with a broadening smile. Jimmy Delaney, since he had ceased being an anxiety to her, was always rather a joke. "I hope he doesn't bring it on that long-legged camel," she laughed. "There isn't much peace and good-will about that heathen beast. We'll have to tie Mac up good and tight."

Amiee smiled and then grew serious. "The three Wise Kings came on their camels to Bethlehem," she said in a low tone. "And they brought very good gifts in their hands."

Betsy nodded and fell silent. She was thinking as she knitted Jimmy's gray wristlet, of the gifts that had come to the little house-

hold in the Wee Corner during that eventful year. She remembered the day in the chilly late winter when she and her mother had first seen the little house nestling among its cluster of trees. She thought of the box that had come after Mrs. Warner's visit. The Garden Party at the Shrubberies and the Flower Basket at the Fair came back to her as her needles clicked. The Birthday breakfast with its harvest of love sparkled in its June sunshine, and the day when the first proof sheets of her mother's novel arrived, were clear before her as she mused.

"Everything that comes to us here in the Wee Corner has been good," she said aloud. "And they keep getting better and better all the time."

Amiee's wistful look was on her face again as she looked up from the pink skirt she was sewing. "It is well to be with those who like us," she said absently. "It doubles happiness to share it. That kind Miss Willie needs someone to keep her well."

Betsy was surprised at the sudden twist back to Miss Willie, but she nodded. "She wants to go home dreadfully," she replied,

taking up a dropped stitch with care. "She says she's going, too. She doesn't know why Dr. Stanton is keeping her. I wonder how it will turn out?"

Amiee said no more and the matter was dropped. Betsy finished the wristlet as Amiee completed the pink skirt, and then it was time to light the lamps and get ready for dinner.

The snow had been melting all the afternoon and the patch of grass at the side of the house was quite bare. Betsy had noticed how green the turf looked in contrast to the snow when she had taken the knitting from its box on the wide window-sill. As she pulled down the shade before lighting the lamp on the center table she gave a little cry of surprise.

"Someone's made a snow-man right under the window," she exclaimed with a laugh at the grotesque figure straddling its clumsy feet on Amiee's little garden bed. "Oh, how funny he looks. Who in the world——"

"I made him of the snow," Amiee told her, coming up to look out at her work. "I brought it from the drifts by the box-bush. I he not a handsome gentleman?"

Betsy laughed again at the bulging black eyes and bushy whiskers of the broad face that leered in at her. "Lucy gave you that old kitchen brush, and you've taken coal for eyes," she said admiringly. "And you put it in the shade so it wouldn't melt. He looks right in the window, too."

"Otherwise he could not be seen to advantage, since no one goes to that side of the grounds," explained Amiee gravely. She seemed to be quite serious, and even anxious about her snow-man.

"He's perfectly fine," Betsy told her gaily, and she wondered why Amiee did not appear to enjoy her creation more.

Then they went up to make ready for dinner and there was nothing more said of the snow-man just then. Mrs. Hale laughed over him when she saw his white face goggling in at the window in the lamplight, and Lucy was called in to see the funny figure. She seemed quite proud of her share in his whiskers.

"He'll last a month with this weather tonight," she said, as she left the room. "Thermometer's droppin' like time. It'll freeze him fast and tight."

Sure enough, the ice was glittering hard on the ponds and puddles in the next morning's sun, and the snow-man stood like a rock guarding the side window of the sitting-room, much to Betsy's delight.

"Let's keep him as long as he lasts," she said. "It will be such fun to have him looking in at our Christmas tree, won't it?"

Amiee still regarded him with her serious gaze, although she smiled at the words. "I shall keep him as long as he will stay," she promised soberly. "He is of much interest to me."

When Philip came in the afternoon, Betsy pulled him to the window before he had his coat off. She wanted him to see that Amiee was capable of a joke on her own account. Then she took him off for a run about the place in the crisp, sparkling air, leaving Amiee and Selma busy with the very last touches on the delayed gifts.

When they were quite out of sight of the house she took out her letter from Major Gordon and handed it to him. She had told him of Amiee's disclosure regarding her father before she brought out the letter. "I haven't

shown it to anyone," she told him, watching his face as he read. She had a great opinion of his judgment, particularly since he had gone to Prep.

He read it through very carefully, and handed it back. "That seems to settle it, doesn't it?" he said seriously. "You've done all you could, but you can't do any more. She'll have to believe what they told her over there—her mother must have died just as they said. Poor kid, she isn't afraid of being a two-sided orphan any more, is she? She seems quite set up over having news of her father in the hospital."

Betsy's letter had made her skeptical. "He may be too feeble to ever come out of the hospital again, or he may lose his memory," she said, thrusting the letter deep in her pocket. "I wouldn't count too much on him, if I were Amiee."

Philip's eyes were wandering toward the tree-tops of the village which peeped over the hill invitingly. "Let's run over and see Emma Clara and the hospital people," he proposed. "Those girls don't want to leave their gim-cracks for an hour. We'll be back before they know it."

Betsy hesitated and then she turned toward the gate. "I've got such lots to tell you," she said happily. "I wouldn't write on purpose. Miss Willie is set on giving her party the night after Christmas and Dr. Stanton hasn't told her that she may leave yet. And Jimmy Delaney is coming with presents for us girls on Christmas morning. What in the world do you suppose he'll bring us?"

## CHAPTER XV

### Betsy Hears Two Pieces of News

"HELEN looks perfectly fine and dandy," Philip told them the next day at the lunch table. "I saw them on their way from the station. She'll be over this afternoon to see you all. Mrs. Bond—Gordon, I mean—wanted me to go on with them for lunch, but I said you'd be expecting me and I'd come some other time."

Mrs. Hale smiled at him and Betsy nodded approval. They knew how Philip felt about taking too many favors from the generous Mrs. Gordon. He had set himself to earn the money she was spending on his education and he would not accept half of the invitations lavished on him by that kindly, hospitable lady.

"Selma's coming to dress the house, and Emma Clara, too," Betsy said with a ring of happiness in her clear voice. "Oh, how

lovely it is to have a house of your own, I never thought Christmas could be so different. It's perfectly *sweet* in your own home!"

She spoke with emphasis and then her face flushed and she cast a look at Amiee.

"I mean all of us, of course," she ended lamely. "Philip and Amiee and all of us."

Amiee, who had been spending part of the morning with Miss Willie, looked calmly up from her plate. "It *is* sweet to be happy with those who need us," she said with unexpected brightness. "Many most beautiful things at this Wee Corner, as you have said yesterday."

Betsy was too thankful to be surprised at the change in Amiee's manner. She hastily added some words about the laurel and evergreen that they had brought from the woods that morning, and how beautiful the church looked in its holiday trim, and turned the subject.

After lunch two good-sized boxes arrived by express. They came jingling up to the door in the station sleigh, and Philip helped Jake Gilpin bring them into the house.

"They're pretty heavy," he said, as he set

his burden down beside the one Jake had deposited in the corner of the hall. "They're for you and Selma, Betsy. You'll have to sign for them."

"They're from Jimmy," cried Betsy, taking the book. "What big boxes! I wonder what's in them? I do hope," she added with a giggle," that he hasn't sent any wild animals to us, just to show Selma that he has begun to get acquainted with them."

Selma had come in with the boxes and she gave a little squeal. "I'd never look at him again if he has," she declared with vigor. "I'd never speak to him——"

"Don't worry," broke in Philip. "Animals don't travel about in air-tight boxes like these. You're safe for a while yet."

"Wild animals are too costly for Jimmy to be sending them about for gifts to his friends," added Mrs. Hale with a smile. "So you are doubly safe, Selma."

Betsy surveyed the boxes with a searching look. "If he only hadn't put that big 'Don't open till Christmas' card on each of them," she sighed, "we might guess what Selma's had in it if I could open mine."

"But you can't," said Selma quickly. "You'll have to wait till tomorrow at eleven. We aren't to open them till Jimmy comes, you know."

She seemed relieved that the boxes were to be a mystery until then.

"We'll all have our presents from Jimmy at once," Betsy explained to Philip. "He's going to bring Amiee's when he comes. Isn't it fun, though? Jimmy's such a jolly thing, I know he's got something dreadfully funny to surprise us with. I can hardly wait till tomorrow to see what it is."

They all shared her feelings regarding the irrepressible James, and when Helen Bond joined them, with Emma Clara a little later, they all discussed the probable absurdity that Jimmy would spring upon them in the morning. The decorations of the rooms went gaily on while they chatted. Mrs. Hale laughed and chatted, too, but she directed their efforts to such good effect that when Miss Willie Welch came in at tea-time, she found the Wee Corner transformed into a veritable bower of evergreen and laurel, with the red holly berries winking and twinkling in the lamplight.

Miss Willie was greeted with a welcome befitting the season, and placed in the chair of honor beside the tea-table. So many questions poured on her by eager young voices that she held up her hands in protest.

"It is the first time I have walked far for many weeks, young ladies and gentleman," she said. "Spare me, if only for the sake of the season. If you will have patience until I have refreshed myself, I will explain why I have come."

Lucy had just brought in the tray, and they clustered about it, each intent on serving Miss Willie as rapidly as possible. Selma gave her the plate and Helen shook out a gay paper napkin for her. Mrs. Hale, as much interested, though not at all eager, poured a cup of tea, while Betsy brought sandwiches and Philip held the sugar dish ready. Amiee was the only one who did not bustle about.

Betsy noticed and held out the sandwich tray. "I'll get the crackers for her," she offered.

Amiee shook her head. Her eyes were shining and she looked very much excited. She went close to Miss Willie's chair and

stood holding to the arm where Miss Willie's elbow touched it. She did not seem to hear the babel of their happy voices. When Miss Willie spoke, she turned and looked at her with an adoring gaze.

Miss Willie cleared her throat.

"I suppose you young people find it hard to wait, so I will disclose my errand," she said, in her clear, pleasant voice. She set the cup of steaming tea down on the table and Betsy saw that her hand was trembling.

"My good friend Mrs. Hale already knows my mission," she went on, "and one of you will guess it by the fact of my coming." Amiee smiled and sighed. "The rest of you will feel surprised, no doubt—" she paused as though undecided what to say, and then she ended rather abruptly: "I am going back to my own home tomorrow evening to stay, and Amiee is going with me. We shall give our party on Thursday evening, and I hope you will all come."

Betsy was absolutely speechless from surprise.

It was not until Helen and Selma had broken the little silence that she found any

words to express herself with, and then she could only gasp and splutter, "But, Mother—Miss Willie—Amiee—" in such blank bewilderment that even Amiee laughed.

Mrs. Hale hastened to add her explanation. "Miss Willie and I talked it over many times within the last few days," she said. "Amiee was told only this morning and as she agreed to the plan, Miss Willie decided to open her house on Christmas day—the best day in the whole year for a home-coming. It seems all very sudden, but it is a happy arrangement, since I have just received an offer from a publisher to write some new articles for him, and I shall have to leave the Wee Corner for a couple of months.

"Oh," cried Betsy, breaking in with flaming cheeks. "Oh, Mother, do you mean France? Shall we really go?"

Mrs. Hale smiled with a little shake of her pretty head. "Not France, my dear," she answered, laughing. "You'll have to give up that old hope of yours. But to some other place that will be very interesting, I hope. Where it is must be a mystery for a while yet. I did not either accept or refuse

it, when Miss Willie made her suggestion in regard to Amiee, whom she has come to be very fond of in the last weeks. It seemed a happy arrangement and when Amiee accepted it so gratefully, we were sure of it. Amiee will go with Miss Willie tomorrow, and begin her life there with a very happy holiday season. We will——"

Once again Betsy broke in. "Oh, not leave the Wee Corner before our three parties are over?" she cried protestingly. "Oh, please, let's stay till after New Year's Day!"

There was a general ripple of amusement at her sudden change of front. It was plain that other matters must wait for a while, as far as she was concerned. The candy-pull, the popcorn roast and the New Year's Eve party were very much nearer her heart just now.

Mrs. Hale assured her that they should not leave until the second week in January, which seemed a long way off, and then a new emotion choked the joy in Betsy's face. She turned to Amiee with sober eyes. "I'm glad that you're glad to go with dear Miss Willie, but I'd have been gladder if you didn't look

quite so glad at leaving the Wee Corner. Of course you'll be glad you've made her glad——"

Philip laid a hand on her shoulder and spun her about to the tea-table. "Turn off the gas, Betsy-girl. You're badly twisted," he commanded. "Mrs. Hale's terribly hungry for those sandwiches you are saving for your own use. Here, give Miss Willie one. She's been almost starved while you are singing that anthem of yours."

Betsy joined in the laugh and handed the sandwiches about. Her cheeks burned with excitement and she was very much agitated by the sudden changes that had come about in so short a time. She wished she could get away with Philip to talk it over.

They formed a circle about the fire after the tea was poured and they discussed everything that had happened or would happen in the next week, over and over again, until Emma Clara declared she was going to take Miss Willie back to the hospital straight away or she'd be such a nervous wreck she wouldn't be able to come over the next morning to the Christmas breakfast as she had promised.

"Come, Miss Willie," she said gaily, jumping up and collecting her wraps. "It's my last chance to bully you and I'm going to make the most of it. I'll tell Dr. Stanton on you if you don't move at once."

Miss Willie dropped Amiee's hand and turned to retort when she gave a start of surprise, recovered herself and laughed out loud. "That ridiculous figure at the window," she explained, pointing to Amiee's snow-man who peered in at them with his goggling black eyes and bushy whiskers through the frosty pane. "He gave me such a start."

There was more laughter at this, for they were all very merry and very much excited. Betsy thought Amiee's smile was the brightest she had ever worn. "She's beginning to enjoy jokes and fun," she thought happily, as she went out with the others to see Miss Willie off.

Helen's car was at the curb and she and Emma Clara wrapped Miss Willie in the warmest rugs before they took their places. Amiee ran out for a last whispered word, and then the car went crunching over the snow, with its ruddy lights gleaming merrily and its horn honking out a jolly farewell.

"It's going to be the best Christmas I ever had," said Betsy, as they all went indoors together. "Things keep happening so wonderfully all the time."

She said it again to Amiee when they were getting ready for bed. It was quite late and she was very tired after the exciting day. Philip was already asleep up in the attic, and his snores were sounding through the house. She repeated her words drowsily, "I wonder what's the next thing?" she yawned. "Nothing will ever surprise me again, though, after today."

Then she kissed Amiee good night and tumbled into bed.

"The Christmas tree is lovely," she thought drowsily. "I wonder what's in Jimmy's boxes. How strange it is that Amiee is going to leave us. France came to us, as Mother said, but it hasn't stayed so very long. If I only knew where we are going!" The thought of leaving the Wee Corner roused her. "But we're to be back in the spring, and Lucy and Mac are going to be here all the time, keeping it ready for us," she assured herself.

Then she fell asleep and dreamed of creaking boards and creeping footsteps just as she had heard them on the moonlight night when Amiee first came to the Wee Corner.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Jimmy Delaney's Christmas Gifts

BETSY woke to Christmas morning and a flood of sunshine streaming through the frosty pane. She sat up remembering everything at once.

"It's Christmas," she breathed happily. "It's really Christmas Day at last!"

There was a sound of creaking boards overhead, and her dream came back to her. "It was dear old Phil," she thought affectionately. "How jolly it is to have him here with us!"

She sped with her dressing and was down before any of them.

"Oh, how *sweet* it all looks!" she said ardently, as she glanced about the cheerful rooms with the Christmas tree shining in the sitting-room corner and garlands of evergreen and laurel, with bunches of gay holly wherever the eye rested. "It's a real, real Christmas!"

She gave a little start of surprise as she looked toward the side window for the jolly snow-man. "Why, he's gone," she exclaimed. "The snow-man's gone."

He had not melted, though. The icicles on the pane told her that. She peeped through the glass and saw him lying in an ignominious heap against the wall. His coal-black eyes lay near the brush that had been his whiskers and his coat and hat swung from a nearby branch.

"Someone's tumbled him down," she said aloud. "What——"

"I took him down myself," said Amiee's quiet voice in her ear. She had come in unseen. "I did not wish him any more."

Betsy felt that she understood. The snow-man had startled Miss Willie, and Amiee, in the excess of her devotion, had made away with him. Such fidelity touched her. "You did quite right, Amiee dear," she said fervently. She found she could be much more affectionate with Amiee now that they were to part so soon. She squeezed her hand and would have said more had not Philip come down at that moment with his hands full of

be-ribboned parcels, and the snow-man was forgotten in the sight of the Christmas gifts.

Mrs. Hale was with them in another moment, and after the greetings were over, they all went out to the kitchen to give Lucy her presents before Miss Willie should appear. There was much laughter and merriment over the expression of sheepish delight on Lucy's face as she opened parcel after parcel. Betsy looked about the cozy old kitchen with a happy sigh. The clock on the shelf was ticking away as bravely as ever, and its old burden sounded clearly in Betsy's ears: "It's fun, it's fun, it's fun to keep house." She nodded at it, while the others were chatting with Lucy. "It *is* fun to keep house, and we're coming back as soon as we can," she said aloud. But no one noticed the little speech.

They trooped back to the sitting-room then, and waited for the first sight of Miss Willie coming down over the long slope by the beech grove. "She's half an hour late. I hope she has not deranged herself by the slippery ice," said Amiee, with an anxious look. "Perhaps I had best go——"

Miss Willie's voice sounding in the dining-room cut her short. She had come in by the short cut, and, far from being damaged by the weather, was glowing and smiling in true Christmas fashion.

"I just had to stop over at my house to see that things were going as they should," she explained while her wraps were being removed by eager, welcoming hands. "It is remarkable how energetic this crisp morning air makes one feel. I could have walked on for an hour, had my engagements permitted."

They were soon at the table and Lucy was serving the holiday breakfast amid a merry babel of happy voices and the scents of spicy evergreen and the cheery sound of the roaring fire that was crackling in the big stove. Betsy sat next Miss Willie and so had a chance for her question.

"What are you going to do about the Inner Court?" she queried in a low tone. "Will Amiee share it, or shall you live in the Outer Court all the time now?"

Miss Willie looked at her with a whimsical smile. "That is still undecided with me, my dear," she said. "I have not had the courage

to either share my sanctuary or give it up—even for Amiee. It may be that she will be with me but a short while. This father may claim her if he recovers soon. Who knows what may take her from me? No, I have not yet decided."

"But you're going there this afternoon," exclaimed Betsy in dismay. "You will have to decide then, won't you?" She could not understand such easy-going methods, though she felt that Miss Willie must know best.

"I have had Mrs. Jones at the house, keeping the fires up and taking care of it as usual—that is, the Outer Court, of course," she replied amiably. "This morning I slipped over there quite early and arranged my own apartments for immediate use. There is a fire in both rooms, and—and I alleviated the plainness of the other side of the house by the removal of some superfluous draperies and easy chairs from my rooms. There was quite too much in them, you may recall."

"What are you two whispering about?" asked Philip, breaking in. "We're going to give our presents as soon as you're all through. It's long after ten and we want to be done with it before Jimmy shows up."

That ended the breakfast at once. Helen Bond came in with her arms full of gay packages as they went into the sitting-room. She halted in the doorway with a bright look of approval. "What a lovely tree, and how jolly you all seem," she said gaily. "I've come over to see the camel arrive. Have you tied up Mac yet?"

"We'll be on the lookout when the camel heaves in sight," Philip told her. "If old Mac shows up, we'll nab him before he gets busy with the Sahib."

A sled with milk cans in it went by, and they made very witty comments on it. A farm wagon on runners with a merry cargo of red-faced children jingled noisily past. It was one minute of eleven.

"He'll be late if he isn't sharp," said Philip. "Perhaps he's stopping to get his camel's hoof roughed."

Another sleigh was speeding down the long incline past the beech grove as they stared into the snowy distance. The two people in it were so covered with furs that they were hardly to be seen. No one looked at them, however, for the town clock was striking

eleven in its deep, booming tones, and Betsy was saying in a disappointed tone, "He hasn't come on time, after all," while the eyes of all the little party were still intent on the distant snowy high road.

Rap! Rap! Rap!

Someone was knocking on the front door.

There was a flurry among the little group. It melted from the window and flew to the hallway. Philip had the lock undone before Mrs. Hale could speak. She had glanced from the front window and seen the sleigh at the gate, but no one listened to her. Everyone was speaking at once.

"Jimmy Delaney! Where's your camel?" cried Betsy as the door flew open and she saw who stood upon the threshold.

"Why, Jimmy!" was all that Selma could say, while Philip and Amiee merely stared and Mrs. Hale held out a welcoming hand. Miss Willie was smiling vaguely at the breathless Jimmy. She was the only one who did not seem surprised or disappointed.

Jimmy shook the ice from his fur collar. He grinned about on each of them and gulped a couple of times. "Say—" he began, and

broke off, as though he had something in his throat.

An eager chorus encouraged him. He tried again.

"I got your Christmas present in the cutter," he blurted out awkwardly, motioning Amiee's attention with a jerk of his head. "It wasn't that party at Alandale after all."

There was not a trace of a joke about him. They all stared at him in sudden silence. Amiee put her hand to her lips. Her face was white and her eyes were wide and frightened. She did not seem to understand his words until he spoke again.

"She's out there, I tell you," he insisted harshly. "Ain't you glad to see her?"

Amiee was out of doors before he could finish the sentence.

Betsy slipped under Philip's arm and followed, unconscious of her own actions. She saw Amiee rush toward the muffled figure in the sleigh. She heard a cry of rapturous recognition and then a babel of tumbled, broken words in rapid French, as the two fell into each other's arms and began to embrace and weep and rejoice.

"It's— it's her mother," said Betsy very quietly to the empty air. She had caught the cry, "*Ma mere!*" as Amiee flung herself into the sleigh. "It's her mother! Oh, it's her mother!" and then she, too, began to cry for sheer sympathy in their joy.

She ran to her own pretty mother and flung her arms about her. She forgot to be shy or reserved in this great moment. "Oh, Mother dearest," she cried with a sob, "Amiee's got the best present of them all! She's got her mother back again."

Of course they all knew that almost as soon as she did. They had seen the meeting and though the words did not reach them, they had the explanation from the sober Jimmy. He had found Amiee's mother in an out-of-the-way town where he was left with some of the animals, when they were moving them to their winter quarters. She had been ill and weak and, as the friend with whom she had come to America had died while she was still very ill in the public hospital, she had drifted to the small town with another French woman, who had soon married and left her to shift for herself. Jimmy had seen her in a baker's

shop where he was buying cakes, and her broken English had attracted his attention.

"Gee, it was fierce, to hear her tryin' to speak United States to that dumb baker woman," he said seriously. "That was how I got to know her. She thought Amiee and Mr. LaLanne were both dead and so she didn't care where she lived. She wasn't called LaLanne, either. They called her Mrs. Lallon in the town there, but mighty few folks knew her at all."

Mrs. Hale listened to Jimmy's eager recital as long as she saw that Amiee and the fur-clad figure were wrapped in that long, eager embrace, but as soon as Amiee stood up again and began to talk, gesturing toward the house, she stepped out toward the sleigh with her hands extended and her face shining. Betsy was very proud of her as she watched her go down the snowy walk.

After that they all went indoors, while Amiee and her mother and Mrs. Hale came slowly up the path and into the hallway, talking very excitedly together. It was like a play, Selma whispered to Betsy, only it made you feel so queer. The two girls held hands

tightly as the three came into the room. Miss Willie was still smiling, though her eyes were bright and keen.

"This is Madame LaLanne, Amiee's mother, whom Jimmy has brought to spend Christmas with us," said Mrs. Hale, ushering her into the room.

Betsy saw a short, dark-skinned woman with large pathetic eyes and thin cheeks. She had the same dark hair as Amiee, but she was more slender and attractive, even in her weakness. Betsy thought Amiee must take after the father in the trenches. She liked Madame LaLanne at once.

Madame LaLanne bowed gracefully as each of the little company was presented. In spite of her evident fatigue—she had come many miles in Jimmy's swift sleigh—and in spite of the tumult of emotions that were agitating her, she made her entrance into the Wee Corner with gracious dignity. Betsy understood Amiee's adoring look. "She's perfectly sweet," she whispered to Helen.

Helen nodded and whispered back, "But is she going to take Amiee with her? Jimmy said she was awfully poor, didn't he?"

Betsy puzzled over this problem while they settled themselves about the cozy hearth, and when Jimmy came in from tying and blanketing his horses, she edged over to him. "Is Madame LaLanne going to take Amiee with her?" she asked.

His freckles fairly popped with surprise. "Halleluyah!" he cried in dismay. "Aren't you goin' to keep her here? I brought her right here, because I thought you were so daffy over war orphans and helpin' French people and all that, I sent her togs along before."

Betsy stared in turn. "Well, they didn't come," she flashed back. "The only things that came were those two boxes for Selma and me."

Jimmy grinned sheepishly. "Those are them," he confessed. "I didn't know how to get her little traps here without lettin' the cat out of the bag. So I sent 'em to you and Selma. I knew it 'ud be all right."

Betsy's blank look was so marked that it drew the attention of Selma and Philip. In the explanation that followed Mrs. Hale bent near to listen, and Miss Willie, too, lent an

open ear. Only Madame LaLanne and Amiee and the polite Helen did not share the discussion, which was very brief.

Miss Willie cut it short with a little exclamation. "I've decided about my house," she said with a nod to Betsy. "I knew it would come straight in good time."

And then she turned around to Madame LaLanne and with a very fine air she made a little speech. She invited Madame LaLanne to share half of her house with her—and of course Amiee was to be there, too—and she insisted that she should accept this shelter as long as she was in America. "Until a better time, my dear Madame," she said with a little bow, "or until your husband comes to claim you and his daughter."

At that all the explanations and exclamations had to be gone over again, for Madame LaLanne did not know that her husband was still alive, and there was a great deal of agitation and some more tears were shed—tears of joy and thankfulness for the great gifts that this holy season was bringing to the widow and orphan.

Betsy volunteered her share. "Major Gor-

don says he is going to look out for Amiee's father when he gets to France," she said as soon as she could be heard. "And if anybody can help him, Major Gordon will."

Jimmy was grinning broadly when he rose to go. He had his own Christmas packages in his pockets. He was plainly glad that his task was over. "I'll have to be gettin' over to see the mother," he said, shaking hands all around with great heartiness. He paused on the threshold to cast a last look over the smiling group about the fire in the festive, green-decked room. He seemed well satisfied with his survey. Then a flicker of another sort of fun came into his twinkling eyes. "Glad you girls like your Christmas boxes," he flung back over his shoulder, and then he was gone.

Betsy cuddled down beside Philip on the hearth-rug, with her shoulder against her mother's knee, while she listened to the long story of Madame LaLanne's wanderings and privations. The cozy fire crackled and the ornaments on the big tree sparkled in the radiance. The scents of balsam and pine breathed out the very aroma of the season. Peace and joy were at each one's elbow.

Suddenly she looked across at Amiee, whose face was bright with happiness.

"But why did you dig in the moonlight?" she asked abruptly.

Amiee did not even start. "I had to get my christening mug and the silver goblets with the monogram on them out of the garden where I hid them when I came," she said earnestly. "I kept them safely all the while we were coming to this America, though in great secrecy. I could not leave them behind when I was to go to Miss Willie's home. They are to show who I am in case of need, and also to keep the fortune in the family. We have not lost those silver goblets through all the years since they were made."

Betsy gasped. "Was that why you made the garden and then threw down the snowman?" she asked incredulously.

Amiee nodded. Madame LaLanne was embracing her again. It was evident that the silver meant more to her than Betsy could guess. Betsy was silent while the talk went merrily on. She was thinking very hard.

"And why did you go to Alandale?" she asked, suddenly turning to Amiee.

"Because Jimmee Delanee told me of a French lady there, who did not become to be my mother," Amiee replied. "He told me on the back of the Sahib camel when I rode."

Betsy sank back in her place again, thoughtfully regarding the fire.

"Isn't it funny how things happen?" she said thoughtfully to Philip, who bent to catch her low tone. "We are going to leave after all, and Amiee will stay here with Miss Willie in the nice, mysterious old house. I wonder if the Nickleman will come up out of his well and talk to her?"

Philip merely grunted. He was watching the leaping flames. Betsy's proposed absence seemed to dampen his spirits. "Things are queer sometimes," he admitted.

Betsy was intent on her own thoughts. "And to think that I felt sure I'd find Amiee's people for her," she went on, smiling into the blaze. "It's all so different from what I expected. French war orphans aren't always like they are in those library books."

Philip flashed his white teeth in a wide smile. "Sometimes they aren't orphans at all," he retorted. "It's all different from what you think."